This Dark Heart

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This Dark Heart

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Summary

Will Graham is an unbonded Omega hiding as a Beta so that he can have a job and live an independent life. But when Special Agent Jack Crawford of the FBI Behavioural Science Unit wants to use his 'unique talents' for profiling serial killers, Will finds himself in the company of an enigmatic and dangerous Alpha, Dr Hannibal Lecter, throwing his world upside down and risking his exposure as he battles his instincts.

Hannibal is curious about Will's inner darkness, seeing within him an opportunity to nurture a monster. He is, after all, curious by nature. But is it only curiosity, or something more? Something only an unbonded Omega can give him...?

Canon-compliant as much as possible. Begins at Season 1, Episode 1.

*** THIS IS SEASON 1. SEASON 2 IS CALLED "THE RECKONING" ***

Notes

This is my very first fan fic, so I hope you enjoy it! I was greatly inspired by MissDisoriental's piece, Bright Hair About the Bone (see link). I've wanted to write an Alpha/Omega story for a while, and was definitely struck with inspiration at the idea of Will hiding his true nature. The story came from there. MissD's story is really good, so please do check it out if you can. :-)

- Inspired by Bright Hair About The Bone by MissDisoriental

Apéritif

Chapter Summary

Special Investigator Will Graham is an unbonded Omega, hiding as a Beta within the FBI and using his ability to empathize with serial killers in order to capture them. Drawn into the investigation of a series of missing college girls by Special Agent Jack Crawford, Head of the Behavioral Science Unit, Will soon finds himself the topic of conversation after suggesting that the killer returned the latest victim to her bedroom as an apology.

Intent on profiling Will, Jack Crawford enlists the help of renowned psychiatrist, Dr Hannibal Lecter, following Dr Alana Bloom's recommendation. Hannibal, quickly realizing that Will is an Omega, takes a keen interest in his dark mind, and in the case. A shred of pipe metal in the most recent victim leads Will and Hannibal to a construction site, where Will locates the details for a suspicious Alpha; Garrett Jacob Hobbs. But Hannibal, curious to see what Will might do when pitted against such a dangerous Alpha, warns Hobbs of their impending arrival, endangering the lives of both Will and Hobbs's daughter, Abigail.

Chapter Notes

Hey peeps, I was weak and could not resist embellishing this chapter now that I'm in the flow of the story. It just seemed so... bland compared to the later chapters!
It's not changed the story at all, just made it longer, lol.
Enjoy!

Violence hums in the air. It stings his skin, scours his nostrils and slides down his throat to choke his lungs. Acrid and bitter, it is an unseen poison coursing through his veins.

Will Graham stands apart from his colleagues, trying to control his breathing, ignoring the pain of his prickling flesh and steadying his heartbeat so that he can do the worst thing; imagine *himself* as the killer. Let himself *become* the killer.

Omegas are typically sensitive, but Will's ability goes beyond that. It is a *gift*, or so he's been told. As he fights to keep the bile from rising in his throat, he realises that, once again, his biology is being used against him. Only this time, he's doing it to himself.

Resonances hang in the room, syrupy thick, sweet as rotten fruit. Will closes his eyes, his ears pricking to the crackle of static as he lowers his defences and allows himself to *feel* the killer.

To become him. He sinks lower into a warm river, riding the current and then…

He's *there*. Darkness surges inside him, overwhelms him. He doesn't see red, but whispers of white that spark from the shadows.

Mrs Marlow is alive, so futilely and pathetically *alive*, walking back and forth to the kitchen, tidying up after dinner. Her face is bright with laughter. So beautiful… So much *potential*…

He waits in the front yard, coiled like an adder in the grass. Looks down at his right hand, knuckles white and shaking around the handle of the gun. He has to do this. Has to. The need is calling him, a siren song too strong to resist.

And then it's time. Something clicks in his brain and he explodes into action. Kicks open the front door, shattering the lock and sending a shrill cry into the air as the alarm begins to wail. Mrs Marlow screams but she can wait.

A big man comes running downstairs; her husband, a useless sack of rotting meat encased in wrinkled flesh and coarse black hair.

Will raises the gun, his lips twisting with disgust as he fires.

'I shoot Mr Marlow twice…'

He hears his own voice cutting through the scene and it jolts him apart from the memory. Will is a shadow of himself, lingering in the edges of his own body as his mind continues to act out the murder. He describes it to himself in calm detail, detached and clinical, looking for evidence that can point the FBI in the direction of the killer.

When he reaches the intercom, he pauses.

There.

With monumental strength, Will wrenches himself away from the scene. He is sweating and shivering, as cold as the time he fell through the ice as a child. Turns to the CSI officer and speaks in a flat, monotonous voice. A dead voice.

'I need the incident report for the home security company,' he says. Only he's not really there… Not really… anywhere… Not yet.

The current pulls him at him, swirling around his legs and whispering silky caresses across his face.

The line was tapped. An officer confirms it. Will dips back into the stream, his eyes darkening as his pupils expand, sucking in all the light from the room until there is nothing but shadow left.

He knows what happened next… The darkness inside him purrs, a rumble in his chest as claws tickle the fine hairs at the back of his neck. They scrape through his hair, across his scalp and he fights down a shiver. Of what? Fear? Desire?

Staring down at his victim, Will feels his lips curve into the barest ghost of a smile. He wants to let go. He wants to give in to the whispers, to the urges…

'And this is when it gets *truly* horrifying for Mrs Marlow,' he whispers. He can feel the pull of the undercurrent threatening to dismantle him, eager to drag his mind away into an endless maelstrom of blood and pain…

And then he blinks and it's six weeks later. It's a memory. Nothing more than a topic on a PowerPoint slide and his voice is echoing throughout the silent lecture theatre; his students enthralled by the brutal accuracy with which he describes the violence.

Will nods to himself. Good. They should be shocked. Murders are supposed to be shocking, even to the FBI.

'Everyone has thought about killing,' he says, surprised that his voice is so steady. No one will ever know. 'Be at your own hand, or the hand of God. Now, think about killing Mrs Marlow.'

He sees the unease ripple through the room, fear sighing from student to student. Will smiles again and the dark thing inside him flickers, scenting the air. Not yet…

'Tell me your design,' he says, ending the class as the timer on his phone flashes a warning. His hour is up. 'Tell me who *you* are.'

The silence hangs for a moment, fragile as spun glass, and then shatters as a dozen chairs scrape across cheap tiles and students get to their feet. The energy snaps and there's a general sense of relief. A breathy laugh that catches and turns into light-hearted chatter as the students pack their books away.

Will releases a breath he doesn't know he's been holding and looks down at his shaking hands. Is that from the memory of that night, or from the pills he's taking?

Hard to tell. Knowing him, probably a bit of both.

An unpleasantly familiar scent flows over to him and Will stiffens. An Alpha, and a strong one, too, from the heavy, musky aroma barely concealed by the sort of aftershave bought at a local department store.

Will closes his laptop and dips his hand into his jacket pocket for the briefest of seconds, closing around the bottle of Beta spray as though its very presence can protect him from being discovered. As an Omega, he has no legal right to a job, let alone one within law enforcement. As an unbonded Omega, his situation is even more… tenuous.

He refuses the use the word vulnerable. Vulnerable implies a degree of weakness, and Will refuses to see himself as weak. Weak, scared, *dependant*, *needy*… He associates himself with none of the typical words used to describe Omegas.

He glances over, dodging the Alpha's eyes with his own, knowing that the FBI agent will immediately spot the gold rim around his irises. The unmistakeable mark of an Omega. As if

his slim frame, soft lips and large doe-eyes weren't enough of a give-away. He hates how fragile he appears. Does everything he can to stop it being true.

'Will Graham,' the Alpha calls, big booming voice and broad shoulders making him feel even bigger than he is. He *radiates* power and authority, creating a circle of space around him wherever he goes. The students, most of them Betas of various rankings, scurry around him whilst surreptitiously glancing at him, some with curiosity, others with outright awe and wonder on their young faces. Will wants to smack them for being so pathetic. Wants to smack himself for wanting to fall to his *knees* in the presence of such a strong Alpha.

'Special Agent Jack Crawford,' the Alpha continues, reaching over the podium to shake with him. 'I head up the Behavioural Science Unit.'

Will flinches and then tries to hide it by putting his laptop into the bag, giving it a tug as though it's giving him trouble. He hesitates but Jack persist and he ends up glancing away before nervously shaking. Oh God… What if Jack can tell what he is by the feel of him? What if he can smell the Beta spray and recognises it for what it is…? It's supposed to be good; he paid enough money for it to know that it's good, and he knows it works on lower level Alphas, but he's not tried it around one as strong as Jack Crawford… not this close before, anyway.

Will pulls his hand back as soon as he's able, hating the way his skin tingles and his cheeks threaten to flush at the feel of the Alpha's hot, firm fingers on his. He isn't attracted to him – if for no other reason than because *Jack* isn't attracted to *him* – it's just a bio-chemical response to the pheromones leaking out of the Alpha's pores. But still, it's *unnerving* and could blow his whole cover if he's not careful.

'We've met,' Will mutters, continuing to pack up so that he can escape as soon as possible.

'Yes,' Jack agrees, smiling down his nose at him, despite the fact that Will is stood on the raised platform and therefore standing slightly taller than Jack right now. Fucking Alphas. 'We had a disagreement,' Jack continues. 'When we opened up the museum.'

Will feels a flare of guilt, followed by a surge of anger at his own stupid instincts. He has *nothing* to feel guilty for; he's perfectly entitled to disagree with the concept, even if it's an Alpha's design. It's nothing more than social brainwashing to make Omegas pliant and submissive to Alphas…

'I disagreed with what you named it,' Will says, determined not to back down or seem uncertain. He still can't bring himself to actually *look* at Jack, though…

Jack, however, doesn't seem to mind Will's stand-offish behaviour. Just nods, tucks his hands into the pockets of his long black overcoat and paces back and forth before him.

'The, er, Evil Minds Research Museum,' he says.

Will fights the urge to bare his throat. Instead, he roughly buckles up his satchel, plants his feet apart and straightens himself all the way up, locking gazes with the Alpha.

Please don't let the gold show, please let it be dark enough…

'It's a little 'hammy', Jack,' he says. He wants to say more but his throat closes up and he falters. Sweat breaks out and he turns away, nervous and hating how much his body is betraying him again. He can feel the tingle of anticipation crawl up his spine, settling as warmth in the back of his neck, right where his crest would be if he were bonded.

Jack narrows his eyes, sensing his submission, and allows a satisfied smile to curve his lips. However, to Will's immense relief, he doesn't make a big deal out of it. Just nods and moves the conversation swiftly on, motioning instead to the projector screen behind Will, where the dead body of Mrs Marlow is still displayed in gruesome HD.

'I see you've hitched your horse to a teaching post,' he says. And then he does something that sets the alarm bells off in Will's mind. He leans over and tries to catch Will's eye again. Speaks softly, as though wary of frightening him… 'I also understand that it's difficult for you to be… social.'

Will's heart begins to beat very fast. He flicks his eyes down again, desperate to escape, aware that he can't outrun the Alpha, that the corridors will be choked with people and that he is, in essence, trapped in here, in this room, with him… The thought makes his chest almost too tight to breathe.

The perception that he is socially anxious started life as a malicious rumour from a spurned colleague, but one that Will actively fostered into its own explanation for his idiosyncrasies. The avoidance of eye contact, the dislike of being touched… All things that an anxious Beta would do. The perfect cover… Apart from fucking Alpha sense of smell.

He can tell that Jack expects an answer, is waiting for him…

Does he know? Does he know?

It's all that Will can think about, but he gives a half-hearted shrug before replying,

'I'm just talking at them; I'm not listening to them… It's… it's not social.'

He can feel himself begin to shake now, and the bottle of Beta pheromone spray is burning a hole in his pocket. God, how he wants to escape into the men's bathroom and douse himself until his skin is on fire with it.

He tries to take a breath, tries to look anywhere but at Jack… But the Alpha is staring at him so intently, so tenderly… so… *what*, Jack? What *is* that look on your face? Why are your eyes soft like that?

'I see,' Jack says softly. '… May I?' And then he reaches out, still with that same gentle look on his face, a soft, sad look of understanding and… what, sympathy? His warm, soft fingers brush across Will's cheekbone, cupping the side of his face in a shockingly intimate gesture that sets every nerve in Will's body on fire.

No, no, no, no!

Because, in that moment, when Will looks at him and their eyes meet, he *knows* that his eyes are ringed with gold and that all the Beta spray in the world can't mask the wave of Omega pheromones that have just poured out of him.

And Jack is responding the way any Alpha should; he is protective, nurturing and worried. He straightens Will's glasses and gives him a little smile before releasing his cheek.

It's over. Jack Crawford knows that Will Graham is an Omega.

But Jack just nods, as if confirming suspicions to himself, and tilts his head in consideration.

'You're not bonded, are you?' he asked quietly. 'And you're taking heat suppressants.'

Will doesn't trust himself to speak so he just nods dumbly. Realises that maybe he's giving mixed signals because he should have shaken his head for the first question but it's too late now.

Jack doesn't seem to notice. It's as though he wasn't expecting much of an answer, anyway. Just nods to himself again and sighs.

'And you can empathise with narcissists and sociopaths?' he asks. Will frowns at this; of all the questions, he wasn't expecting this one.

'I can empathise with anybody,' he snaps, surprised that his voice is clear and strong. He was expecting more of a hoarse croak, given how shaken he feels. He returns to fumbling with his bag, desperate to be out of here, away from Jack and his prying eyes, his *pitying* eyes, and his overbearing presence. It's too much right now; Will feels as though he's about to cave in on himself. Become… other…

He jerks his tie from around the collar of his plaid shirt and stuffs it in with his laptop and books. 'It's less to do with a *biology disorder* and more to do with having an active imagination,' he says.

Jack's eyebrows climb at hearing Will describe being an Omega as a biology disorder, but doesn't say anything. Just tries a different tactic. Alphas are nothing if not persistent.

'Well, then… Can I… *borrow* your imagination?' he asks, lowering his head and looking Will straight in the eyes again. Will hesitates, gold-rimmed eyes flicking up and down, to and from the Alpha's intense gaze.

He can feel his shadow-self slither up through his ribcage, coiling around his chest, quivering in anticipation at the prospect of being inside the mind of more murderers.

He should say no. Will knows his gift is too unstable, too unpredictable… He could end up lost in whoever he has to become…

He sets his jaw and steels himself to meet Jack's eye again.

'Yes.'

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Walking across campus from the lecture halls to the building housing the Behavioral Science Unit, Jack fills Will in on the details of the case.

‘Eight girls abducted from eight different Minnesota campuses, all in the last eight months.’

‘I thought there were seven?’ Will checks, frowning at the Alpha beside him. Jack sighs.

‘There were.’

Will’s heart sinks, and a shiver runs down his spine.

‘When did you tag the eighth?’ he asks, and Jack quirks an eyebrow.

‘About three minutes before I walked into *your* lecture theatre.’

‘You’re calling them abductions because you don’t have any bodies,’ Will guesses, hurrying to keep up with Jack’s longer strides.

‘No bodies, no *parts* of bodies, nothing that comes *out* of bodies. Nothing,’ Jack growls.

‘Then those girls weren’t taken from where you think they were taken,’ Will says, ducking after him as Jack turns a corner and heads inside.

‘Then where *were* they taken from?’ Jack demands, but Will just shrugs.

‘I don’t know. Someplace else.’

‘All of them abducted on a Friday so they wouldn’t have to be reported missing until Monday,’ Jack continues, slowing as they near his office. ‘Now, however he’s covering his tracks, he needs a weekend to do it.’ He stops outside his door and gestures for Will to go in ahead of him.

Will pauses at this; he can’t help but glance at the Alpha because they normally *insist* on leading the way, especially with an Omega. From the set of Jack’s jaw, Will can tell he’s waiting on purpose, and that it’s difficult for him, so he ducks his head in a quick show of submission and goes in without comment.

The room is sparsely furnished; functional without being emotional. The far wall is dominated with an evidence board; a large map of the states, framed by photographs of the missing girls with string tying them to where they disappeared, and photographs of the scenes.

Jack grimaces and hands Will a thin paper file. The Omega opens it, his stomach churning as he stares down into the pretty, smiling face of an inevitably dead girl.

‘Number eight?’ he checks, and Jack nods.

‘Elise Nichols,’ he replies. ‘St Cloud State on the Mississippi. Disappeared on Friday; she was supposed to house-sit for her parents over the weekend, feed the cat… She never made it home.’

Will removes his glasses; he doesn’t need them as much when he’s not using the Iris Inhibitor drops to darken the gold in his eyes, and, because he doesn’t find anyone else particularly appealing as a potential mate, he hasn’t had to use the drops since Alana Bloom stopped visiting him at lunchtimes.

‘One through seven are dead, don’t you think?’ he mutters. ‘He’s not keeping them around; he got himself a new one.’

Jack nods, his mouth set in a grim line.

‘So we *focus* on Elise Nichols.’

Will looks up. Stares at the board, at the seven dead girls smiling at him from their pictures. His shadow croons to him; *such potential*...

He swallows the bitter taste in his throat.

‘They’ve very, um… *Mall* of America,’ he says, taking a step closer and pinning Elise underneath number seven. ‘That’s a lot of wind-chafed skin.’

‘Same hair color, same eye color; roughly the same age, same height, same weight… So, *what* is it about all these girls?’

Will’s darkness slithers up his spine, wraps around his neck and licks his ear. He shakes his head.

‘It’s not about all these girls,’ he says softly, feeling the warm current pushing against his legs. ‘It’s about *one* of them. He’s like Willy Wonka; every girl he takes is a candy bar; hidden in amongst all those candy bars is the *one* true *intended* victim, which, if we follow through on our metaphor-’ He shrugs at Jack. ‘- is *your* golden ticket.’

Jack frowns at the board.

‘So, is he warming up for his golden ticket or just reliving whatever it is he did to her?’ he asks.

‘The golden ticket wouldn’t be the first taken, and she wouldn’t be the last,’ Will says, earning himself a puzzled look from the Alpha. He explains, ‘He would, er, *hide* how special she was.’ His shadow purrs and Will feels heat crackle up his back. He turns away, ready to go back to class. ‘I mean, *I* would; wouldn’t you?’

Jack looks at the board again.

‘I want you to get closer to this.’

‘No; you have Heimlich at Harvard and Bloom at Georgetown,’ Will says, grabbing his bag from the couch and hurrying towards the door. He knew, he *knew* this would happen. Fucking Alphas. ‘They do the *same* thing I do.’

‘That’s not exactly true, is it?’ Jack points out, turning to face him and squaring his shoulders in a show of dominance. ‘You have a *very* specific way of thinking about things.’

Will snorts a bitter laugh.

‘Huh… Has there been a lot of, er, *discussion* about the *specific* way I think?’

‘You make jumps you can’t explain,’ Jack says softly. Reverently. ‘Even more so than other Omegas.’

‘No, *no*,’ Will snaps, shaking his head, *hating* the way his voice is starting to shake. ‘The *evidence* explains.’

‘Then *help* me find some evidence,’ Jack says, and Will grits his teeth. He looks at the door; it’s barely three feet away but it might as well be on the moon.

‘That may require me to be *sociable*,’ he warns, but the Alpha merely looks at him, and waits for the inevitable. For Will’s shoulders to slump and his head to come down, baring the side of his throat in surrender.

Jack’s won. Again.

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The Nichols live in Duluth, Minnesota. A big, suburban house set back from the street behind a manicured front yard. Both parents are Betas, their faces lined with worry as they wait for Jack to say something.

Will keeps his back to them; their energy is distracting. It scratches at his back, flicking his ears and making them ring… Instead, he stares at the photographs on the dresser, listening to the memories of the house… Something dark, something beautiful… It’s faint but it’s there…

‘She could’ve gone off by herself,’ Mr Nichols mumbles. A desperate attempt to bely the truth that they *know* but can’t accept. ‘She… she was a very *interior* young woman…’ His wife nods, spilling tears down her cheeks. Jack nods back, but he doesn’t say anything. There’s nothing he *can* say.

Mr Nichols tries again.

‘She… she didn’t like living in her dorm… I can see how the pressure of school might have gotten to her…’ He looks up, begging the Alpha with his eyes. ‘She likes trains… Maybe she just got on a train and –’

‘She *looks* like the other girls,’ Mrs Nichols interrupts, her voice wobbling. Jack nods.

‘Yes; she fits the profile.’

‘Could Elise still be alive?’ Mr Nichols asks, his hands shaking around his untouched coffee mug. Mrs Nichols looks at Jack, waiting, her faint glimmer of hope fading from red-rimmed eyes when he sighs and says,

‘We simply have no way of knowing.’

Staring with unseeing eyes at a photo of Elise, Will feels warmth flare in his belly and he frowns.

‘How’s the *cat?*’

Mrs Nichols frowns, her mouth parted in confusion as she looks from Jack to the strange, detached young man asking about the family pet when her daughter’s life is at risk.

‘What?’

‘How’s your *cat?*’ Will repeats, turning and approaching Jack, who can barely suppress a grimace at how *unsociable* the Omega is being.

Will hunches his shoulders, avoiding eye contact by looking at the table, at the walls, anywhere but at *them*, his hands shoved deep into his trouser pockets with one fist clenched tight around his can of Beta spray.

‘Elise was supposed to feed it; was the cat *weird* when you came home?’ he persists. ‘It must’ve been hungry; it didn’t eat all weekend.’

Mr and Mrs Nichols share a look, raising their eyebrows at each other, and then Mr Nichols shrugs.

‘I didn’t notice,’ he says. Will nods. He knows; he *knows*… He needs Jack, needs to tell him, but he *can’t*, he can’t in front of them… His throat catches around a sound and he hugs his elbows, dipping his head towards the Alpha for help.

Jack nods to the Nichols.

‘Could you give us a moment, please?’ he says quietly, and leads Will into the back room, rubbing at the sweat on his forehead, wondering if this was such a good idea…

Will swallows the lump in his throat.

‘He took her from here,’ he whispers. Jack sighs, and Will knows he needs to explain, so he adds, ‘She… she got on a train, she came home, she fed the cat… Then he took her.’

And Jack nods, his face dark because he trusts Will. He presses a button on his cell phone and lifts it to his ear, his voice ringing out when he speaks.

‘The Nichols’s house is a crime scene. I need ERT immediately. I want Zeller, Katz and Jimmy Price… Yes, and a photographer.’

Elise's parents go pale and Mrs Nichols holds her hands up to her mouth; half prayer, half denial.

'Why is it now a crime scene?' Mr Nichols demands. Jack doesn't respond immediately, and Will is the one to look over, his shadow dancing in his eyes.

'Can I see your daughter's room?' he asks. Mrs Nichols shrugs, helpless, dabbing at her eyes with a tissue. Mr Nichols swallows.

'Police were up there this morning…'

Will pulls on a pair of blue latex gloves and leads the way upstairs, following the sickly sweet resonances. They're getting stronger… thicker…

The cat paws at the underside of the door, trying to get into Elise's room. Will tilts his head and reaches for the handle, but Mr Nichols gets there first – he can't smell that Will is Omega, he's just protecting his daughter, even though she's not there.

'No; I'll get that.'

Will pulls up short, his darkness snarling at the Beta in his way.

'Mr Nichols, please put your hands in your pockets and avoid *touching* anything,' he says, trying hard not to snap. Mr Nichols frowns, but he doesn't look angry, just lost.

'But… we've been in and out of here all day,' he says. Will shrugs and gestures to the pet.

'You can… hold the *cat*, if it's easier,' he suggests, and the Beta does, lifting the feline into his arms and hugging it close.

Will pushes the door away from him and his shadow roars to life. *Yes*.

She's *there*. Elise; perfect, sweet, dead Elise, lying in bed as though sleeping. But too perfect for sleep; perfectly still, perfectly cold…

Mr Nichols jumps forwards at the sight of his daughter's body.

'*Elise!*'

Will grabs him, fighting to hold him back, to keep him from contaminating the scene.

'I need you to *leave* the room,' he growls, clenching his jaw to keep from sinking his teeth into the Beta's throat.

Mine; my beautiful girl… Stay away from her…

The shadow is too strong; too heavy. A thick, musky scent fills the room. It's *everywhere*. It's *in* him… Will can feel himself start to shake and heat shivers up his spine, tickling across the back of his neck.

An *Alpha* did this. The killer is an *Alpha*…

He calls for Jack, shoving at Mr Nichols to get the Beta out of the room. The cat jumps down, meowing for Elise to wake up, and Will shouts for help again. Staggers when Jack pulls Mr Nichols off him, his hands shaking and mind whirring as he turns back to the bed.

Mine… My beautiful girl… My girl…

'Alpha,' he whispers, his throat tightening around a whine of – what? Longing? He can't… He's not…

He can't *think* clearly with all this noise. He pulls himself back into the corner of the room and waits for Jack to sort out the situation.

Forty minutes later, Jack touches his upper arm to get his attention and Will blinks, coming back to himself and the room with the poor dead girl, the room with the heavy, tangy musk of a rutting Alpha…

'Take your time,' Jack says, dipping his head to speak softly into Will's ear. Soothing him. Protecting him. 'When you're ready to talk, you talk. If you don't feel like it, you don't talk. We'll be downstairs.' Jack shields him from the doorway, keeping him out of view. Will feels very small next to him, just because Jack is all hulking shoulders and furrowed brow; he's designed to look threatening, to keep everyone else at bay.

'You let me know when you're ready for us to come in,' Jack continues, and he slips away before Will has to nod.

My girl…

The memories sing to him, just out of hearing, just out of reach… Will approaches the window, sucking up the smell of cool night air… Change of the season; autumn sliding away into winter… He looks out beyond the net curtain, past the flashing lights to Mrs Nichols in the back of an ambulance, wrapped in blankets but still shivering, unable to breathe despite the oxygen mask on her face.

I waited on the balcony…

Will dips into the current. It rises, warming him… He's there; Friday night… He watches Elise sleep… She's so beautiful… So precious… His darkness pulses in time to his heartbeat, filling him, oozing through his pores to seep into the very air around him…

I have to do this…

The tightness explodes in his chest and he lunges at her, a knee to the gut, his hands around her throat. Elise wakes but she can't even scream, can't cry or fight or do anything but stare up at him with wide, blue, terrified eyes.

I squeeze the life from you…

She's dying. Slipping away. It's nearly time… So close… Will's shadow licks at something deep inside and then –

'You're Will Graham.'

A female voice shatters the reconstruction. Tears apart the memory. Will comes back to himself with a shuddering breath, drenched in icy sweat. He's been ripped from the current and he has no idea where he is… *who* he is…

He blinks rapidly, clearing the black fog from his eyes until he can see her. He knows her; Beverly Katz. Slim, Asian, with glossy black hair and a fragrant musk… She's an Alpha. She's also the one who spoke to him. The one that, right now, his shadow is *snarling* at.

'You're not supposed to be in here,' he gasps, his voice quivering with the force of his shaking.

Beverly ignores him, her face lit up with fascination as she considers him; *Will Graham* in the flesh.

'*You* wrote the standard monograph on time of death by insect activity,' she says. She grins and nods, impressed.

Will can only stare; he can *see* where he would bite, where he would tear out her throat or wrap his hands around it and choke the life from her…

He's being swept away. He needs to find his feet, get his bearings again. Ground himself, but Beverly is talking again and he can't *concentrate* on anything but her silky voice.

'Found *antler* velvet in two of the wounds,' she says. She looks down at his belt, clocks his ID badge and frowns. 'You not real FBI?'

'I'm a, er, *Special* Investigator,' Will replies. He tries to swallow, his voice hoarse. *Please don't see the gold… Please don't let it show…*

Beverly raises her eyebrows at him.

'*Never* been an FBI agent?'

Will looks away, down, away again, his eyes darting from side to side, looking for an escape. Beverly's scent is subtle; she's mated, but mingled with the smell of rutting Alpha from the bedroom… His skin is crawling.

'Um, s-strict screening procedures,' he mutters, and Beverly nods.

'Detects instability.' She grins at him. 'You unstable?'

I…

Will swallows. Releases a breath when he senses Jack come up behind him; the taller Alpha is focused on Beverly, coming to stand between her and Will so that he can protect the

Omega.

‘You know you’re not supposed to be in here,’ he says, but Beverly ignores the rebuke.

‘I found *antler* velvet in two of the wounds, like she was gored,’ she replies. ‘I was looking for velvet in the other wounds but I was interrupted.’ She watches as Will turns away, her dark eyes sparkling with interest.

Two Betas enter the room – Brian Zeller and Jimmy Price; they work with and for Beverly. Will turns his back on them and returns to the window, distancing himself from their scents, from the *noise* they push into the room around him… They disturb the current, the memories… everything swirls and catches, muddying the water until he can’t tell what he’s supposed to feel anymore…

‘Hold on, *excuse me*,’ Zeller says, looking down at Elise’s body. ‘Deer and elk *pin* their prey, okay; they put all their weight into their antlers and suffocate a victim. That’s how they’d kill like a fox or a coyote.’

‘Elise Nichols was strangled, suffocated, her ribs are broken…’ Jack huffs in confusion.

Will looks over his shoulder at them.

‘Antler velvet is rich in nutrients,’ he says. ‘It actually *promotes* healing; he may have put it there on purpose.’

‘You think he was trying to *heal* her?’ Jack doesn’t bother keeping the disbelief from his voice.

Will sighs, blinks, frowns against the headache squeezing his temples. *Alpha*...

‘He wanted to *undo* as much as he could,’ he sighs. ‘Given that he’d already killed her.’

‘He put her *back* where he found her,’ Jack says, shaking his head in confusion. Will shakes his head. He can feel it; the current tugs at him again… He *knows*…

‘Whatever he did to the others, he couldn’t do it to her.’

They both stare at the dead girl; she could be sleeping. *So beautiful*...

‘Is this his golden ticket?’ Jack asks, and Will looks at the floor, at the bed; considers his answer before he speaks.

‘No… no, this is an *apology*,’ he murmurs. He glances up and sees everyone staring at him, Jack frustrated, Beverly still impressed, Price with a puzzled frown and Zeller with his hands on his hips, disbelief etched into face.

The breeze floats the killer’s musk across his face and Will swallows down an itch in his throat; is that a *whine* his body wants to make?

Alpha...

He blinks, his eyes stinging from the headache slicing across the top of his skull. He needs a hot shower and a handful of heat suppressants, which he left in his car at the airport. For now, painkillers will have to do.

‘Does anyone have any aspirin?’

***

Driving back through the dark roads of Wolf Trap, Virginia, Will steadfastly ignores the churning heat in his stomach. His headache has retreated to the back of his head, right above the nape of his neck, and he’s decided that he just has acid reflux from taking heat suppressants on an empty stomach. It’s got nothing to do with the musky, smoky smell of the Alpha who killed Elise Nichols… Nothing to do with the aching, empty feeling in his gut, deep in his core…

He brakes as an animal comes into view of his headlights. A brown collie-cross by the look of it, running along the side of the road trailing a piece of frayed rope… Will’s chest tightens and he whimpers before he can stop himself. People dump dogs out here all the time…

He rolls down his window, slowing the car to a crawl so that he can call to the stray.

‘Hello.’

The dog drops from a canter to a trot, and Will parks up just ahead. Gets out and waits near the bonnet, holding out his hand for the dog to sniff as it approaches. It’s wary; ears down, tail tucked between his legs… He’s been hit before. Hurt by humans…

‘Hey, hey… it’s okay…’ Will reaches for him; he’s *so* close, but then the dog bolts and he’s left alone again on the country road in the middle of the night.

Fuck.

It’s late, and he needs to sleep… Will squeezes the nape of his neck, trying to relieve some of the tension, *hating* how smooth and soft his skin is, and then scrubs at the stubble on his cheeks. Driving to a nearby convenience store, he grabs buys a pack of hotdogs and a leash, and half an hour later he’s back on the road, emergency lights on and sat on the edge of the boot, enticing the dog closer with the meat. It takes a while, but eventually his new pack member takes the food from his hand and licks him in return. An hour later, Will’s kneeling on his front porch, scrubbing fleas and dirt from his new pet’s coat, murmuring comfort and praise to the dog because he’s allowing the Omega to bath him.

When he’s done, and he’s just as soggy as his dog because the stray shook water all over him seven times and then pressed his sopping body up against him when he was scared of the hairdryer, Will changes into a t-shirt and pajama trousers, pouring himself a glass of whiskey even though he’s already so tired he feels drunk. Maybe the alcohol will help with the nightmares…

Sighing to himself, Will takes a sip and closes his eyes as he feels the last of the night’s tension finally, *finally* begin to slip away.

‘Winston, this is everybody,’ he says softly, speaking to the dog in the crate at his feet. ‘Everybody, this is Winston.’

The pack barks and whines a greeting, and Will hushes them so that they don’t scare their new brother. He sits back in the dining chair he’s brought out with him – the porch chairs are laced with frost – and Buster, his little terrier, jumps up to share Will’s sandwich with him.

I don’t need an Alpha, Will thinks, watching his pack sniff around the crate, getting used to Winston. He clenches his teeth against the stab in his gut and drinks more whiskey. *I don’t need anyone.*

***

Whispers fill his ears, slither inside his skull, tickling up and down his spine until he’s humming. The heater is on and Will can tell his cheeks are flushed. Are the dogs too hot? He glances over but they’re all quiet, curled in their beads around the fireplace, fast asleep.

He doesn’t remember waking up, only that he is… But...

Rolling his head to the side, his heart climbs up his throat when he sees the dead body of Elise Nichols next to him. Her eyes are scuffed marbles in her skull, her lips blue, skin waxy… As he rolls onto his side, reaching for her, she rises up, her head falling back, limbs hanging as her abdomen rips wide. Claws rake him from the inside, something dark and twisted fighting to get out from inside him, fighting to *kill*...

No!

Will jerks awake, dripping with sweat. He’s shaking, shivering like he’s cold but his skin on fire. He sits up, his teeth chattering, pathetic little mewling sounds bubbling up from his throat as he calls for an Alpha that isn’t there. For a mate he doesn’t have.

I’m fine; I don’t need anyone. I don’t need a mate. I don’t want a mate…

As much as he forces himself to think it, right now he can’t make himself *believe* it, and the cries get higher, more painful to hear. His shoulders cave in on themselves and he struggles to breathe. Will peels his soaked t-shirt from his body, hissing in pain when it scrapes over the tender skin on the back of his neck.

Alpha…

Half-falling into the bathroom, he grabs two of his softest towels. The damp cotton of his bed is scraping him, rubbing him raw. He lays one towel down on the wet mattress and pulls the other over him, tucking it up to his chin because that’s as close to a nest as he’ll allow himself right now… After all, the nightmares wasn’t *that* bad… Not like…

No. He’s not thinking about *that*.

Will curls up on his side, staring at the endless empty space where there is no dead body, where there is *no* body… No *body*… *Nobody*… No Alpha, no mate…

I'm alone…

Will bites his knuckles to keep from keening. Screws his eyes tight shut and waits for sleep to return. Waits for this feeling to go away. For the fear to subside…

Alpha…

***

The heating is never right in the Quantico buildings. It's *always* either too hot or too cold. Today, it's too hot.

Will dunks his face into a basin of cold water in the washroom, feeling it against his eyelids, up his nose… Blood seeps into him, filling him… He can never wash this feeling away…

He opens his mouth to scream, to drown the whimpers out of him but all that happens is air bubbles and then he's upright, dabbing the wet from his cheeks with a paper towel and avoiding his reflection in the mirror because he knows what he'll see – pallid, drawn, tired…

Jack strides in before Will's even had a chance to recognize his scent. He suppresses a flinch, but barely; the Alpha is furious, and the air around him crackles with tension, stinging and slapping at Will's skin like splinters.

'What are you *doing* in here?' the Alpha demands. Will sniffs at the tone and dries off his hands.

'I enjoy the smell of urinal cake,' he quips, ducking his head to avoid Jack's intense eyes. The Alpha plants himself squarely in front of him and crosses his arms.

'Me too. We need to talk.' Another FBI officer walks in, already unzipping his fly, and Jack rounds on him. 'Use the ladies' room!'

Will braces himself back against the sink, trying not to laugh at the look of horror on the Beta's face at being snarled at by such a big Alpha. He'll probably never use this bathroom again.

'Do you *respect* my judgment, Will?' Jack asks, frowning at him as he paces back and forth. Will's mouth twists unhappily but he nods.

'Yes.'

'Good,' Jack says. 'Because we will stand a better chance of catching this guy with you in the saddle.'

Will nods again, but he's chewing his lip. He can't lie to Jack; not to an Alpha.

'Yeah, I'm in the saddle,' he says shakily. 'Just, um… *confused* which *direction* I'm pointing.' Jack huffs and rolls his eyes at him, and Will's dark shadow roars to the forefront of his mind, giving him the strength to *explain* it to the Alpha. 'I don't know this kind of

psychopath. I've *never* read about him. I don't even *know* if he's a psychopath; he's *not* insensitive – he's not shallow.'

'You *know* something about him,' Jack insists, his eyes sparking red as passion deepens his voice. 'Otherwise you wouldn't have said "this is an apology". What *is* he apologizing for?'

'He… he couldn't *honor* her!' Will says, blurting out the thought that's in his head, even if it doesn't make sense. He paces back and forth, his neck aching with tension, his eyes itching as the gold band spreads from the outer ring of his irises. 'He feels bad!'

'Well *feeling* bad defeats the purpose of being a psychopath, doesn't it?' Jack retorts, and Will scoffs, two bright spots of color high on his cheekbones.

'Yes, it *does*!'

'THEN WHAT KIND OF CRAZY IS HE?!' Jack bellows, and Will flinches back, hands on his hips but head bowed; a submissive, appeasing gesture designed to remind the Alpha that Will isn't a threat; that he's vulnerable to him, even as his veins pound with black anger.

'He couldn't show her he *loved* her,' he says quietly. 'So he put her corpse back where he killed it; whatever crazy *that* is.'

'You think he *loves* these girls?' Jack says, his face twisting with disgust at the idea. Will starts to pace again – he needs to *move*, needs to do *something*… Needs to get *away* from Jack… He rubs at the fresh pain throbbing in his forehead and his hand comes away wet with sweat. His hair is darkening with it and he can feel his shirt clinging to his armpits.

'He loves *one* of them,' he says, fighting the *obscene* urge to cry. 'And, by association, yes, he has some *form* of love for the others.'

'There was no *semen*, there was no *saliva*; Elise Nichols died a *virgin*,' Jack snarls. 'She *stayed* that way.'

'That's *NOT* how he's loving them!' Will yells, and he can *feel* his eyes flash bright gold as he challenges the Alpha standing over him. He's backed up against the sinks again, trapped, his chest heaving and heart thundering behind his ribcage. 'He wouldn't *DISRESPECT* them that way!' He can't stop now that he's started; the rage is pouring from him like dam waters. 'He doesn't *want* these girls to suffer; he kills them quickly and –' He cuts off, swallows what he was *going* to say and instead says, 'To *his* thinking, with *mercy*.'

Jack nods, taking it in. His eyes are deep red; he's fighting *every* instinct that tells him to slam Will down on the ground and pin him, to *prove* that he is not to be challenged so easily… Will trembles, and waits for the blow.

'Sensitive psychopath,' the Alpha says, his nostrils flaring as he thinks. 'Risked getting caught so he could tuck Elise Nichols back into bed.'

'He has to take the next girl soon,' Will says, the gold slowly shrinking from his eyes as fear replaces anger. ''Cos he *knows* he's gonna get caught… one way or the other.'

***

The lights of the forensic investigation lab are bright. Clinical. *Glaring*. Will looks away as Zeller, Price and Katz unzip Elise Nichols from the black body bag. He hugs his elbows, his skin *aching* from the residual violence in this room. *So much death…*

'Okay… Tried her skin for prints, of course, *nothing*,' Price says. 'We did get a hand spread off her neck.' He looks over at the monitor. None of them look at Will, but the question hangs in the air, unspoken, between them. *Why are you here? Why won't you look?*

'Report say anything about nails?' Beverly asks. It's Zeller who replies,

'Fingernails were smudged when we took scrapings; scrapings were from her own palms when she scratched them – she never scratched him.'

'Piece of metal is all we got,' Katz says, voicing everyone's frustration.

Will ignores the whispers stroking at his cheek, trying to get him to look, to *look* at the body…

'We should be looking at plumbers, steamfitters, tool workers…' he says, speaking to them without ever moving his eyes to them. Zeller and Price raise their eyebrows at each other. Nobody speaks.

Look…

Heat flares in the base of his skull, sliding, molten, down his back. Will's shadow purrs, twining between his legs like a cat and he sighs.

He can't resist. He looks. Stares into the darkness of the autopsy hood, at the blackness covering Elise's face and he *knows*… He *knows* what happened because he *did* it. The memory… It's *so* strong. So real…

From very far away, Zeller's voice reaches him.

'Other injuries were probably, but not *conclusively* post-mortem, so *not* gored.'

'She has lots of piercings that look like they were caused by deer antlers,' Beverly says, and she scoffs at him. 'I didn't say the deer was responsible for *putting* them there.'

'She was *mounted* on them,' Will says, his grim voice cutting through the quiet. Everyone turns to him, but he's not seeing them; he's not seeing *anything*… 'Like hooks… She may have been bled.'

'Her liver was removed,' Zeller says, returning to the job at hand. 'See that? He took it out, and then… yep, he put it back in.'

'Huh…' Price squints at the body. 'Why would he cut it out if he's just gonna sew it back in again?'

My girl… I'm so sorry; I couldn't honor you…

Will takes a breath, fighting nausea.

'There's something wrong with the meat,' he says quietly, and Zeller looks at him in shock.

'She has liver cancer,' he confirms, his finger on one of the tumors. Katz and Price look at Will, too, their faces identical masks of puzzlement and awe.

Will nods, his shadow dancing in his eyes. He presses his lips together to keep from baring his teeth in a snarl. In a smile.

I know your design.

'Yeah, he's um… he's *eating* them.'

***

Of all his patients, Franklyn Froideveaux is simultaneously the most insufferable and yet *pathetically* charming, and Hannibal Lecter does not give such high praise easily.

An overweight Beta with too much money and mild anxiety carefully twisted into a handful of *delightful* neuroses, he is Hannibal's regular Monday and Thursday morning appointment. He is currently sobbing in the armchair facing Hannibal, reaching for him with a sweaty, pudgy hand as tears leak from his eyes.

'Please…'

Hannibal allows his upper lip to curl into a faint sneer of disdain – Franklyn likes him mean, after all – and waits for a long moment before holding out his box of tissues. He makes no effort to lean forwards and Franklyn nearly slides out of the seat as he pitches forwards and plucks two from the offering.

'Thank you,' he snivels. He blows his nose and dabs at his cheeks. 'I hate being this neurotic.'

Hannibal suppresses an eye roll. Instead, he says,

'If you weren't neurotic, Franklyn, you would be something *much* worse.'

Franklyn sobs again and then drops his dirty, crumpled up tissue onto the spotless glass table beside him. It takes every ounce of self-control not to narrow his eyes and bare his teeth; Hannibal merely feels his jaw tighten as he notes the defamation of his office.

'Our brain is designed to experience anxiety in short bursts,' he says, choosing to distract himself with writing a note in his book, instead of carving Franklyn's face to pieces. '*Not* the prolonged duress your neuroses seem to enjoy. That's why you feel as though a lion were on the verge of devouring you.'

Franklyn cries into his remaining tissue. It's… tedious.

‘Franklyn,’ Hannibal says, and the Beta immediately looks up, desperation carved into his pudgy, sweaty face.

‘Yes?’

‘You have to convince yourself the lion is not in the room,’ Hannibal says, and Franklyn takes a deep, shaky breath., ready to argue.

Hannibal feels his darkness swell as he sits forwards in his chair, and he allows the very edges of his irises to pulse red as he purrs,

‘When it is, I assure you; you will know.’

***

Sitting in Jack Crawford’s office on Friday morning, Will feels like he’s lost a fight to a bulldozer. He can’t get the violence out of his head; it swarms him, consumes him… He can’t eat, he barely sleeps… And now Jack has invited another Alpha to help with the case. Another *strong* Alpha; maybe even stronger than Jack.

‘Tell me; how many confessions?’ Dr Lecter asks, his European accent caressing each word before he speaks them.

‘Twelve dozen, last time I checked,’ Jack growls. He’s stood with Hannibal by the evidence board, his hands on his hips, Lecter with his hands in his trouser pockets. ‘None of them had any details. Until this morning,’ he adds, returning to his desk and sinking into his chair. ‘And then they *all* had details.’

Will tries not to stare at him, but Hannibal Lecter has such force of presence that he fills up the room, making it hard to breathe and impossible to force his eyes anywhere but on his sharp-cut suit jacket and expensive leather shoes. Even dressed casually, he looks impeccable. Will’s sensitive nose twitches, detecting a hint of cedarwood and cloves; a subtle cologne designed to enhance the Alpha’s natural scent, rather than cover it. He hates how the back of his neck is tingling, as though invisible fingers are brushing up and down the sensitive skin there, waiting for it to flush red in preparation for a bite…

‘Some *genius* in Duluth PD took a photograph of Elise Nichols’s body with his cell phone, shared it with his friends, and then *Freddie* Lounds posted it on TattleCrime.com,’ Jack says, and Will frowns.

‘*Tasteless*,’ he mutters. He hasn’t fully realised that he’s spoken aloud until Dr Lecter turns, scorching him with his full attention as he stares down at Will.

‘Do you have trouble with taste?’ Hannibal asks, the words flowing over and around him, making Will work hard to suppress a shiver.

He swallows, staring fixedly at a coffee stain on Jack’s desk, wishing to God he’d kept his mouth shut because he doesn’t want – he *can’t* have – another Alpha realize what he is. He

can feel the tension thrumming through him and sets his jaw against any errant teeth chattering.

‘My thoughts are often - ’ He chews his tongue, trying to find the way to phrase it. ‘*Not tasty*.’

Dr Lecter examines the board again, reviewing the map where the girls have gone missing.

‘Nor mine,’ he agrees. ‘No effective barriers.’

‘Well, I build forts,’ Will says, covering the quiver in his throat with a swig of bitter black coffee. Jack never remembers to give him sugar.

‘Associations come quickly,’ Hannibal says, wandering across the room to take the seat beside him. He acts like he owns the place; a stalking jungle cat, all long limbs and sharp planes of his face, his eyes laying Will’s soul bare before him…

‘So do forts,’ Will growls, dumping the mug back on the desk. He really needs to get a grip. He’s taken a new dose of heat suppressants, and doused himself thoroughly in Beta spray. There’s no way Dr Lecter can know what he is… And why does he *care* so much, anyway?

Beside him, Hannibal clasps his hands over his knee. He eyes Will with great fascination, curious as to why Special Agent Jack Crawford of the Behavioral Science Unit at the FBI wants a psychological profile of the man sat across from him, and why he is so concerned about him. Perhaps there is more to Will Graham than meets the eye?

He is certainly an intriguing character, Hannibal reflects. Will has acute empathic abilities that allow him to take on the thoughts and feelings of another person, completely, even someone whose point of view disturbs or sickens him. A fascinating gift, one that Hannibal is certain young Will feels is a curse.

He hides a smile behind his own cup of vile coffee. How he would *enjoy* delving into such a sensitive mind, exploring its depths and tasting the inevitable darkness waiting there. To take on the thoughts and feelings of so many killers… Will’s mind must indeed be a wicked and tormented place. Such potential, as well; to strengthen Will’s most vicious desires and see what unfolds…

And yet… This close to him, Hannibal’s sensitive sense of smell is assaulted by cheap aftershave – the sort that comes in a bottle with a ship on it – as well as sharp chemicals masquerading as…

He controls himself, stops his eyes from widening and his mouth from curving into a predatory smile as he realizes the truth about Will.

He is an Omega. Unbonded, as well; of that, Hannibal is certain. Why else would Will avert his eyes so fastidiously, except to hide the tell-tale glimmer of a gold rim, bright in its innocence?

Hannibal takes a slow, deep breath, categorizing and discarding the chemicals until he can place Will's own scent, little more than a faint whisper of allure crushed beneath layers of artificial pheromones. The nape of Will's neck will be pale and creamy, smooth over his vertebrae and unmarred by the bite mark of a claiming Alpha. Once bonded, Omegas develop a crest, ridged skin in varying shades of burgundy, depending on their maturity, heat cycle and strength.

Hannibal idly wonders why Will isn't bonded – how can he stand to be alone when Omegas are built for an Alpha pairing – and then if he might get to see Will's nape one day. To see such a vulnerable and private part of an Omega's body…

He tries to look into Will's face, to read the expression on his gentle features, but the younger man ducks his head and looks away. His movements are jerky, like a puppet on knotted strings. He is in pain from being in the killer's mind; the connection has left his body with unseen bruises.

'Not fond of eye contact, are you?' he says softly. He can feel his own Alpha urges rearing up; to protect Will, to calm him, but Will is far too fascinating in his current state for Hannibal to give in to such baser instincts. Will is a litany of paradoxes: fear and courage, rage and calm, desire and disgust… At what? His own biology? How interesting it could be to take Will's mind and break it open; to allow him to experience his emotions and feelings without restraint. How powerful he could be…

'Eyes are distracting,' Will spits, fiddling with the paper file in front of him. 'You don't see *enough*, you see *too much*…' He turns to scowl at the Alpha, and, as he speaks, he makes the mistake of looking into his eyes. 'And it's hard to focus when you're thinking "oh, those whites are *really* white", or "oh, he must have *hepatitis*" or "oh, is that a burst vein?".'

He stills, struck by how very *dark* Dr Lecter's eyes are. His pupils glint like obsidians, set against the dark brown of coffin dirt, ringed with the barest whisper of blood, and they sparkle when he smiles. *Oh fuck*, he thinks. *He's really handsome*…

Hannibal keeps the gaze constant, grinning at the blushing Omega. Traces the sensuous curves of Will's face with his eyes, drinking in and committing the details to his memory. The furrowed brow in a constant state of concern; shadowed eyes begging for sleep and the unhappy turn of his mouth… Gentle nose, sharp jaw strengthened with a beard, soft lips and high cheekbones… He's a work of art.

Heat floods him and Will has to swallow the lump in his throat.

'So, yeah, I try to avoid eyes whenever possible,' he finishes hoarsely. Turns back to the other Alpha for help. '*Jack?*'

'Yes,' Jack says, returning when Will calls him. He sits down as Will leans forward, but Hannibal speaks again before Will can distract himself with the case.

'I imagine what you see and learn touches everything else in your mind,' he says, and his soft, earnest tone draws Will in again, coaxes him to look into his face.

Alpha…

‘Your values and decency are present, yet shocked at your associations. Appalled at your dreams.’ Hannibal tilts his head slightly closer, his lips curling into a tiny, conspiratorially smile as red warms his eyes again. ‘No forts in the bone arena of your skull for things you love.’

Yes…

Will frowns, his eyes threatening to flare gold as panic claws at his throat.

‘Whose profile are you working on?’ he whispers, and then he bares his teeth at Jack. ‘Whose profile is he *working* on?’

You’re a clever boy, Will, Hannibal thinks, sitting back and adjusting his jacket, repressing the urge to purr at how *adorable* the Omega is when he’s nervous.

‘I’m sorry, Will; observing is what we do,’ he says. ‘I can’t shut mine off anymore than you can shut yours off.’ He takes another sip of coffee. Hides an admiring smile when Will leans forwards and growls, with an extraordinary show of strength, at Jack.

‘Please, *don’t* psychoanalyze me. You won’t like me when I’m *psychoanalyzed*.’

‘Will…’ Jack says, trying to soothe him, but Will is already jerking to his feet, more than done with this discussion and desperate to be out of this room, away from Dr Lecter before a wave of fucking Omega pheromones come pouring out of him because there is just *something* about him that’s unsettling and getting under Will’s skin already…

‘Now, if you’ll excuse me,’ he snaps, grabbing his jacket and briefcase. ‘I have to go and teach a class... about psychoanalyzing.’

He misses the raised eyebrows shared between Jack and Dr Lecter in his haste to leave. Almost barrels into a field officer returning from another crime scene on his way down the corridor, and barely mumbles some sort of apology before stumbling into the elevators and seeking refuge inside the steel box.

Christ… What *is* it about Dr Lecter? He was in the room with him for barely ten minutes but he’s exhausted as though he’s spent hours running. His skin is tender; he has been stripped raw under such avid attention.

The elevator trundles down to the ground floor and Will escapes out into the cool afternoon air to cross the campus to the lecture theatres. He gets into the empty classroom early and, when he catches sight of his reflection in the glass of the door, he is surprised to see twin spots of color on his cheeks and a light sheen of sweat on his forehead. His eyes are burning bright gold around the edges and Will swears under his breath at how obvious his body is being.

He has some eye drops in his desk drawer, somewhere. Shoves aside pens and scraps of paper, wincing as he impales the tip of his finger on a staple, and then grabs up the little

bottle.

He hasn't had to use these drops in *months*…

Will sighs and removes his glasses. With the ease of practice, he deposits two drops into each eye, huffing out the only sound of pain he'll allow at how much it stings. However, when he checks his eyes again, the gold rim has darkened to little more than a coppery brown, undetectable once again.

Will shakes the bottle, testing how much is left. Not much. He'll have to go easy on it, and try to stay away from Dr Lecter if his body is going to react in such a ridiculous way around the other man…

Perhaps it was a one-time thing. As Will hides the drops into the back of his drawer again, he tries to ignore the sinking feeling that he's going to be using a lot of them over the next few weeks.

***

Death has a particular odor, Will thinks, stuffing his hands deep into the pockets of his ratty old jacket and huddling down against the sharp autumn wind and aggression lingering in the air.

The body is impaled on a stolen stag's head, center stage in the middle of a field. Crows are pecking out chunks of dead flesh, cawing their indignance as Zeller drives them off with wild, flapping gestures.

Will frowns at the tableau, a nerve underneath his eye twitching because it just doesn't *feel* right. The brutality, the callousness… It's like smashing two jigsaw pieces together at the edges and hoping they'll make one image.

It's *wrong*.

Minneapolis Homicide have already made a statement and are calling the killer the Minnesota Shrike. Jimmy Price, birdwatching being one of his many hobbies, happily explains that it's a type of hunting bird known for impaling its prey on twigs and thorns, ripping out their organs and storing them in a little 'birdy pantry' for eating later.

The dark current rises inside him and Will's shadow swells with it. He follows the pattern in the air, the memory, the resonance, something smoky and rich and… *elegant*. He's powerful. An apex predator; master of his kingdom. And yet…

'He wanted her found this way,' he purrs, tilting his head as he picks up on something else. Almost snorts a laugh. 'It's… *petulant*.' He comes to stand over her, over her naked body, out there for everyone to see… 'I almost feel like he's *mocking* her…' He shakes his head, more of an irritated flick because his neck is prickling, as though there are nails dragging their way down his scalp. Crouches by the girl's face, enthralled by the blue tinged lips, mottled purple bruises and the single blade of grass on her eyelashes. 'Or he's mocking *us*.'

‘Where did all his love go?’ Jack murmurs, gazing mournfully at the dead Beta girl.

‘Whoever tucked Elise Nichols into bed didn’t paint this picture,’ Will mutters.

‘He took her lungs.’ Zeller sounds choked, like he’s fighting down sickness. ‘Pretty sure she was alive when he took ‘em.’

Will shakes his head, his eyes prickling gold as he stares up at Jack. He has to make him understand. He *has* to.

‘Our cannibal *loves* women,’ he says. ‘He doesn’t wanna destroy them, he wants to *consume* them… to keep some part of them *inside*.’ He stands up and tries to shove at the heavy resonances sticking to his arms, to his gloves… to his mind. *No forts in the bone arena of your skull…* ‘This girl’s killer thought she was a *pig*.’

Jack frowns, considering this.

‘You think this was a copycat?’ he asks, sounding skeptical.

Will, dizzy and sweating from the sheer amount of *pain* around him, starts to walk away. He needs to sit… to be *alone* for a while. He needs to *breathe*.

‘The cannibal who killed Elise Nichols had a *place* to do it and no interest in…’ He shakes his head. ‘In *field kabuki*.’

You’re not the killer. You’re something else.

Will stops, throwing out the knowledge that his shadow whispers into his ear because, now that he’s seen what it’s *not*, he *knows* more about Elise Nichols’s killer.

‘He has a house, or two, or a *cabin*… Something with an antler room…’ He pauses, and it clicks. *I understand*… Fear tickles his heart, making it skip a beat. ‘He has a daughter. The same age as the other girls… Same hair color, same eye color, same height, same weight… She’s an only child…’ *My girl… My beautiful girl*… ‘She leaving home,’ he whispers, tears welling in his eyes because his chest *hurts* at the thought of not seeing her. ‘He can’t *stand* the thought of losing her.’ He huffs. ‘She’s his golden ticket.’

He turns to leave – his head is pounding and his scent is rising, thickening to a sweet musk. His Beta spray is either wearing off or it’s not enough to deal with the Omega pheromones pouring out of him because he’s distressed. He has to get out of here. Now.

‘What about the copycat?’ Jack asks, and Will pauses, sighing because he can’t just *run away* like he wants to, and he hates that he even *wants* to run away.

‘You know… an intelligent psychopath, particularly a *sadist*, is *very* hard to catch,’ he says, his voice shaking too much to control. ‘There's no traceable motive, there'll be no patterns. He may never kill this way again.’ He sees Jack open his mouth to respond and turns away, tossing his final, cutting, comments over his shoulder. ‘Have *Dr Lecter* draw up a psychological profile. You seemed *very* impressed with *his* opinion.’

He doesn't wait to see the flash of guilt, possibly hurt, on the Alpha's face. Just ducks beneath the yellow crime scene tape at the edge of the field and skids his way down the slope to where his car is parked. Dives into it and slams the door shut against the world.

Fuck…

What the fuck is he doing? This is why he teaches. Why he stays in a classroom.

Will stares at his reflection in the review mirror, watching the shadow battle with the gold in his eyes. His hands are shaking and his knuckles white from gripping the steering wheel. When he starts the car, he jumps at the sound of the engine catching.

He can't help but feel like someone is following him. Like some *thing* has crawled inside his skull and nestled there, latched onto him and is slowly poisoning him… He drives back to his motel and, when he gets there, goes straight into the bathroom.

He strips out of his clothes, biting back a wince even though he's alone because he refuses to show any sign of weakness. He's exhausted but he'll be lucky if he gets an hour or two between the nightmares. His body is battered and tender. He climbs stiffly into the tub and turns the dial on the shower to boiling in the hopes that he can burn away the feel of the murder.

One more day. He only has to spend one more day here, and then he can go home. To his dogs. To his normal life. To his own smells and his own bed… To the comfort of the familiar.

As the hot water thrashes his eyelids, Will's calloused fingers ghost over the planes and ridges of his body. Water catches on his sharp shoulder bones, creating a fine mist around him. His brown curls are plastered to his skull, dripping over his forehead. He could melt into the shower and be washed away with the Beta spray and the memories of the stag's head…

A raven stag watches him. It's a beautiful thing, really. Majestic and dangerous. Sharp antlers and gleaming obsidian eyes. Feathers mingling with the fur of its neck… When it moves, they catch the light and warm it through with red. With blood.

It lowers its head, watching him. Ever waiting. Ever knowing.

Calculating…

A series of knocks on his motel room door jerk him from sleep. Will blushes at the startled whimper he *knows* he made, and desperately tries to untangle himself from sweat-damp sheets. Rubs his eyes and stumbles his way through the dark room to tell whoever is disturbing to fuck off.

Only, when he unlocks the door and pulls it towards him, Will is bathed in the musk and cedarwood scent of Dr Lecter. He squints against the harsh grey of the overcast sky. Tries to ignore the way his stomach tightens into an uncomfortable knot at the presence of the other man. And then feels his mouth go dry as he realizes that he isn't wearing his Beta spray. That he is, essentially, *naked* before the Alpha, smelling of sweet Omega musk…

Fuck.

Dr Lecter *knows*. *Knows* he's an Omega, and, from the way Will just felt his eyes flash bright gold, also knows he's *unbonded*.

Fuck.

'Good morning, Will.'

Hannibal speaks with a deliberately brisk and cheerful tone, inwardly delighting at the warring emotions on the younger man's face. Panic, certainly; Hannibal has surprised him, not allowing Will time to bathe in that hideous Beta spray and aftershave he is so fond of. His brown curls are sleep-tousled and unruly, strands clinging to his forehead as vestiges of nightmare sweats. Hannibal is curious what Will Graham has nightmares about.

However, despite the panic in his gold-blue eyes and the tell-tale fluttering of his pulse in his silky throat, Hannibal can also tell that Will is curious as to why he is here, perhaps even… grateful?

He smirks.

'May I come in?' he prompts, but to his surprise, Will stands his ground and continues to block the doorway, uncomfortably shifting from foot to foot in his cheap white t-shirt and thin boxers.

Will flicks his gaze past Hannibal's shoulder, his heart thundering in his chest. If he looks at the Alpha's eyes, he'll never escape.

'Where's Crawford?' he asks, more sharply than he meant to but… He's *nervous* around Hannibal.

Hannibal gives a delicate shrug.

'Deposed in court,' he says, not sounding at *all* sorry about it. 'The adventure will be yours and mine today.' He allows his smile to touch his lips as he says this. He can see the spark in Will's eyes, making the gold flare just a little brighter at the idea of spending time with an Alpha. *That's it, Will… Give in…* He inclines his head, a little more pointedly this time, and repeats, 'May I come in?'

Will holds out for a second longer, but he knows it would be rude to turn Dr Lecter away, and he has no good reason for that… *Except that he's an Alpha and you're an unbonded Omega*, he thinks to himself, but he can't exactly use that as a justification.

So, he shrugs and steps back from the door, inclining his head in a nod of submission to Dr Lecter's indomitable will.

Hannibal feels a rush of adrenaline when Will turns his back on him – a part of him trusts him already, even though he doesn't know it – and he catches a brief look at the pink flush creeping up the nape of the Omega's neck.

You like me, Will.

Hannibal narrows his eyes at the confirmation – it could be very useful, after all – and steps into the dingy little motel room. It is a sad place; peeling floral wallpaper and stained floorboards. He hides his grimace at Will walking around barefoot, and makes sure that he is the one to part the curtains because he doesn't want Will touching anything in this room that he doesn't have to.

'I'm *very* particular about what I put into my body,' he says, lacing the words with innuendo and receiving a broken breath from Will in response. 'Which means I end up preparing most meals myself.'

He sits them at the little table before the window, the weak sunlight slanting through the gap in the net curtains and lighting up the Tupperware bowls of scrambled eggs, tomatoes and sausages he has made.

Will sits across from him, his stomach roiling at the fact that Dr Lecter – an *Alpha* – has made and delivered him breakfast… And is now sitting down with him to eat…

Is he… *Courting* him? Or is this normal behavior for… what? Friends? Colleagues? What is Dr Lecter playing at?

'A little protein scramble to start the day,' Hannibal says, handing Will's breakfast over to him. Steam wafts into the chilly bedroom air, carrying with it the mingled scents of meat, eggs and the herbs complementing the dish. Despite his confusion, Will's stomach rumbles its appreciation and his mouth waters in anticipation of the taste. He hasn't eaten such lunchtime yesterday, when he bolted a miserable cheese sandwich on the way to the crime scene. He forgets to eat when he's alone. He knows that many Alphas would use that as an excuse to bond with him, so that they can *take care of him*. Will isn't sure if Hannibal is taking care of him because he's an Omega, because he's *him* or if Hannibal is just… *socializing*.

To save himself from his wandering thoughts, Will spears a chunk of sausage and begins to eat as he tips the rest of the food onto the plate Hannibal provided. The sausage melts onto his tongue, seasoned to perfection and grilled until it is firm and juicy. Will's senses jump into overdrive – Omegas are, after all, hedonists – and he really tries to make himself chew it several times before swallowing.

'Mmm, it's delicious,' he says, and, despite his lingering anger at Dr Lecter, he really does mean it. And, despite the fact that he *does not like* the man across from him, he goes feel grateful that someone – an *Alpha* – is taking care of him. 'Thank you.'

He offers him a tiny smile, more a twist of his lips than anything *nice*, and then drops his eyes back to his plate.

In spite of the anger adding a smoking tone to Will's scent, Hannibal experiences an odd tingle in the base of his spine at the sight of the offered smile. Careful not to push the Omega, sensing his nerves, he simply nods and keeps his expression and tone neutral.

‘My pleasure.’ And it is. To see Will’s lips curve upwards, even for a moment… It brings Hannibal pleasure.

Will, however, is obviously still smarting from Hannibal’s comments to him yesterday, and there is a wall of tension between them.

‘I would apologize for the analytical ambush yesterday,’ Hannibal says, lifting a forkful of fluffy scrambled eggs to his mouth. ‘But I know I will soon be apologizing again, and you'll tire of that eventually, so, I have to consider using apologies sparingly.’

Will stabs at a chunk of egg, hating the way his hands are shaking and his forehead is beading with sweat. Hannibal’s scent is creeping over the table, smothering him, enfolding him in a cocoon of safety and all he wants to do is stare at him and open himself up until Hannibal says those fateful words… *You’re mine*.

He glares at him between shoving food into his eager mouth and reaches for his coffee. It’s rich, aromatic and *sweet* – perfectly suited to an Omega’s tongue.

‘Just keep it professional,’ he snaps, ignoring the way his heart is hammering in his chest at standing up to an Alpha. God; the pheromones must be pouring off him. He can’t help but glance to the side, to the can of Beta spray and bottle of heat suppressants stood on his bedside table, nestled alongside his hunting knife and 9mm automatic. Just a typical Omega’s belongings…

‘Or we could socialize, like adults,’ Hannibal persists, allowing himself to gently rib Will, now that his shoulders have lowered somewhat. ‘God forbid we become… *friendly*.’

‘I don't find you that interesting,’ Will lies, staring at his drink so that the gold in his eyes can’t betray him. His heart skips a beat when Hannibal pauses for a moment, and he wonders what will happen to him when he pushes the Alpha too far.

Hannibal, however, is enjoying Will’s little show of defiance. It’s adorable, really. The boy is trying so hard to deny the effect Hannibal’s scent is having on him. Perhaps, next time, he should do a work-out before coming to see him, build up a sweat and then ride with him in the elevator. He would be curious to see Will’s reaction.

He dips his head and smirks at Will from beneath his lashes. Cannot resist one last bit of flirtation.

‘You will.’

There is no mistaking the way Will’s breath hitches in his throat, and he looks down at his food, taking his time chewing a mouthful of egg and sausage as Will fights to control the trembling in his hands.

‘Agent Crawford tells me you have a knack for the monsters,’ Hannibal continues, and Will abandons his food to lean his elbows on the table.

‘I don’t think the Shrike killed that girl in the field,’ he says, and Hannibal mimics him by also leaning forwards, offering him his undivided attention.

‘The devil is in the details,’ he agrees. ‘What didn’t your copycat do the girl in the field?’ *Tell me, Will; how did I make the scene different for you?* ‘What gave it away?’

‘Everything,’ Will whispers, and he scrubs his cheeks because he’s worried his face has just lit up with excitement – he can *share* this with Hannibal; the Alpha *gets* him. ‘It’s like he had to show me a negative so that I could *see* the positive.’

He sighs and rubs his face again. He’s too eager… Dr Lecter is a shrink, after all – if he seems too *pleased* by a murder then what does that make him?

‘That crime scene was practically *gift-wrapped*,’ he explains, and Hannibal returns his attention to his food so as not to risk any trace of emotion on his face. *So you did like the gift… You’re welcome*.

‘The mathematics of human behavior,’ he says. ‘All those ugly variables.’

Will pulls a face and tops up his coffee as the Alpha continues to speak.

‘Some bad math with this Shrike fellow, huh?’ Hannibal looks up at him, driving the words in deep. ‘Are you reconstructing his fantasies? What kind of problems does he have?’

Will sniffs bitterly and speaks before taking another gulp of his new favorite drink.

‘He has a few.’

Hannibal is quiet for a moment, satisfied to see the Omega savoring his coffee, and then picks up more food as he asks,

‘Ever have any problems, Will?’

Will rolls his eyes and grins, pointing to his own chest with a charming amount of sarcasm.

‘*Me?* No.’

‘Of course you don’t,’ Hannibal teases, and he grins back. ‘You and I are just alike.’ *More than you’ll ever know*. ‘Problem-free. *Nothing* about us to feel horrible about.’ He watches as Will eats another piece of sausage and then adds, ‘You know, Will, I think Uncle Jack sees you as a fragile little teacup. The finest china, used for only special guests.’

The words sting but Will fights a flinch, and Hannibal’s darkness purrs in self-congratulation when the Omega breaks into a full laugh, sitting back in his chair, arms to the side, legs open in an unconscious show of submission and accepted vulnerability – all his organs on display. Will’s face lights up at the idea of someone else, an *Alpha* no less, knowing that he *loathes* being treated with the typical gentle caution and over-protectiveness of most Alphas around Omegas, and Hannibal’s gut clenches at how very *attractive* Will is when he smiles, when he laughs. He has to pause for a moment whilst his heart finds its way back down to his ribcage. Makes a decision, then and there, to make Will smile for him more often.

‘How do *you* see me?’ Will asks, the question leaving his lips before he’s fully realized how *dangerous* the answer could be. He sees Dr Lecter grow still, holding his gaze, and something hangs there between them, heavy with possibility, fragile in its vulnerability.

Oh Will, Hannibal thinks, allowing the Omega to see a flicker of red in his own eyes. To see past his own fort to the darkness sheltered inside. *You don’t want to be protected, do you? You want to be feared… You’re dangerous, like me…*

‘The mongoose I want under the house when the snakes slither by,’ he says, and he watches as his compliment has the desired effect. Will’s eyes burn bright gold and his cheeks pinken in a *delightful* blush as his scent sharpens with the first hint of slick. Hannibal feels an ache in his groin and he has to fight down the purr threatening to rumble in his throat.

Will can’t breathe; he can *smell* his scent thickening with desire, a sweet, smoky musk, all the stronger for his open legs and thin boxers. But he can’t seem to make himself move, to close his thighs, and, to his abject horror, he’s sure his body has decided that *now* is the best time to remember how to make slick; the slippery, clear wetness adding a sugary aftertaste to his scent.

Fuck.

Because Hannibal *must* be able to smell it, and a male Omega making slick without neck manipulation only means one thing; that Will *really* likes him, and that he’s *more* than willing to take his knot…

Fuck.

But Hannibal, ever the gentleman, doesn’t comment on it. Instead, he merely smiles an apology at his own Alpha instincts and gestures with his knife and fork to Will’s plate.

‘Finish your breakfast.’

When he picks up his own knife and fork, Hannibal has to check that there is no tremble or sign that he is anything more than politely intrigued by the man within touching distance, despite the tightness coiling in his belly and the heat flooding at his chest.

So much potential…

It’s been years since he met anyone with a shadow to rival his own. Will could prove more entertaining yet, and he doesn’t appear to resent Hannibal giving him the odd instruction. He watches, satisfied, as the Omega returns to shoveling food in his mouth, making the odd, unconscious little sound of pleasure at the taste and texture of the food Hannibal has provided him with.

This could be dangerous, Hannibal thinks, taking a sip of his own coffee and adding the flavor to the meat residue on his tongue. *I shall have to keep an eye on you, Will*.

‘So, how often do you travel for work?’ he asks, looking to distract himself from his awkward thoughts. Will glances up from his plate and shrugs.

‘Um, when Jack asks for it,’ he says. ‘I don’t get involved in that many cases.’

‘Only the complex ones,’ Hannibal suggests, and Will nods.

‘Yeah… I’m actually just a teacher.’

‘Never just a teacher,’ Hannibal replies, grinning at him. ‘Educating young minds and broadening horizons.’

Will raises his eyebrows at him, scoffing at his description of his lectures and the blank expressions on many of his students’ faces.

‘Something like that,’ he mutters. Decides to ask his own questions. ‘Do you cook a lot?’

‘It’s one of my many passions,’ Hannibal replies, gathering up a tomato to accompany the forkful. ‘And you?’

‘Do I cook?’ Will snorts. ‘Er, no, not if I can help it.’ He thinks about it and then frowns. ‘Well, I cook for my dogs.’

‘You have dogs?’ Hannibal feigns interest, but seeing Will smile is worth it, and he forgets to eat for a few minutes as the Omega tells him about his collection of strays, gesturing with both hands, his face lit up and eyes sparkling as he describes their various personalities. Omegas are, after all, naturally nurturing.

‘- a lot of people dump them in the area,’ Will explains, reaching for the coffee again. Realizes it’s running low and hesitates. ‘Um, do you want…?’

‘Help yourself,’ Hannibal says, gesturing for him to take the rest. ‘And your latest…?’

‘Winston,’ Will says, and grins again. ‘Yeah, he’s settled in well. Really well, actually. I don’t think he’s been out on his own for long.’

‘What you do is very kind,’ Hannibal says. ‘Do you find new homes for them?’

Will grimaces, but it’s ruined with a smile that belies how he *truly* feels about being surrounded by dogs.

‘Um… Not as often as I should,’ he admits, and Hannibal huffs a laugh.

‘You must appreciate the company,’ he says. *Let me in, Will… Tell me about yourself.*

Will sits back in the chair again and shakes his head. His plate is nearly empty, Hannibal notes, and smiles to himself.

‘I like the quiet,’ the Omega says. ‘People are… complicated.’

‘So many emotions,’ Hannibal offers, and Will stills when he realizes that the Alpha is referring to his Omegan empathy. He frowns and stands up, turning away from Hannibal,

who takes the opportunity to glance down and admire the curve of Will's buttocks in the thin cotton.

'I have to get ready,' Will says, moving to the dresser. 'I'll be out in a minute.'

'Take your time,' Hannibal says, his eyes narrowing just slightly when he sees Will pick up the foul Beta spray from his bedside on his way into the little bathroom. He hears the lock click and, a moment later, the shower.

Safe from the Alpha, Will sinks onto the toilet seat and buries his face in his hands. What the fuck is he doing? He shouldn't even be *entertaining* the idea of spending time with an Alpha, let alone someone like Dr Lecter…

He squirms and grimaces at the damp patch on the back of his boxers. God; it's been years since he's felt that, and it's a hideous reminder of –

No. He's *not* thinking about that.

Will jerks to his feet and rips his t-shirt over his head, kicking off his boxers and then climbing into the shower to get ready. He has a job to do.

He washes himself thoroughly in the hopes that his body will get the message and *stop* making anymore slick, and, as he does so, reasons that Hannibal is just being friendly, nothing overt, and *nothing* like typical Omega courting.

He's not interested in you, he thinks, adding an extra layer of Beta spray to his skin and hair, just in case. *And I'm not interested in him… So there's nothing to worry about… Everything's fine.*

***

Pulling up outside the site office, Will can't help but scowl at the grinning Alpha beside him. Hannibal's scent has filled the car, settling on his skin, *in* him, making the back of his neck itch and burn. It's making him… irritable.

'What are you smiling at?' he barks, jerking the parking brake and cutting the engine. Hannibal continues to smile, as pleased as a child out to the zoo.

'Peeking behind the curtain,' he explains. 'I'm just curious how the FBI goes about its business when it's not kicking in doors.'

Will huffs and frowns out at the construction site before them. He's warm, and the late autumn sun is slanting down into his eyes, giving him a headache.

'You're lucky we're not doing house-to-house interviews,' he replies. Then, to explain why they're here, adds, 'We found a little piece of metal in Elise Nichols's clothes. A shred from a pipe threader.'

Hannibal looks out past the windscreen as well, schooling his expression to neutrality.

‘There must be hundreds of construction sites all over Minnesota,’ he says, and Will sighs.

‘Certain kind of metal, certain kind of pipe, certain kind of pipe *coating*…’ He shrugs. ‘So we’re checking all the construction sites that use that kind of pipe.’

Hannibal takes this in, and then leans closer, looking into Will’s face *just* to see the gold flare.

‘What are we looking for?’ he asks coyly, and Will’s breath hitches.

‘Um, at this stage, anything, really… But mostly… anything *peculiar*.’ He glances at the Alpha, ducks his eyes and then hurries out of the car into the safety of the fresh air. Watching him go, Hannibal allows a faint smirk to touch his lips when he smells fresh slick from the Omega.

Oh, Will… You can’t help it, can you?

Going through the construction company files is indeed tedious, but Hannibal is enjoying being close to Will, savoring the changes in his scent as his dark shadow lifts its head, tasting the air and then dismissing leads as the Omega flicks through files. He pauses when Will stops on a name, and his own darkness shifts in response to the sudden smokiness deepening Will’s musk.

He’s found something.

Will doesn’t know why, but the paper he’s holding… There’s *something*…

‘Garrett Jacob Hobbs?’ he asks, directing the question to the annoying woman hovering around them.

‘He’s one of our pipe threaders,’ she replies. Sulkily adds, ‘Those are all resignation letters; plumbers’ union requires them whenever members finish a job.’ She glares at them and then hisses into the phone she’s holding, ‘I’ll call you back.’

Will nods, tilting his head at the way the paper whispers to him. He’s not sure… There’s just… *Something*… A scent, perhaps? A memory?

‘Er, does Mr Hobbs have a daughter?’ he asks. The sulky woman shrugs.

‘Might have.’

‘Eighteen or nineteen, wind-chafed skin, plain but… pretty? She’d have auburn hair, about this tall?’ He gestures to his jaw, and Hannibal glances at him. His darkness has its own scent; a rich, earthy smoke that blends beautifully with Will’s natural vanilla… *I could breathe that in all day*.

‘Maybe; I don’t know,’ the woman replies, being as unhelpful as possible. ‘I don’t keep company with these people.’

‘What is it about Garrett Jacob Hobbs you find so peculiar?’ Hannibal asks gently, prodding Will to examine his shadow, but the Omega merely shrugs.

‘He left a phone number, no address.’

‘And, therefore, he has something to hide?’

Will blows out his breath at Hannibal’s cynicism and turns to explain,

‘The others all left addresses. He also missed work for days at a time.’ Looks over at the unhelpful secretary again. ‘Do you have an *address* for Mr Hobbs?’

You’ve found him, Will, Hannibal thinks, keeping his eyes lowered on the file in his hand because he can feel them pulse red with delight at Will’s talent. *What will you do if he’s waiting for you? If he knows you’re coming for him?*

***

The chirrup of birds fills the air. It’s warm; the sun has burned off the last of the morning’s chill and left a fresh day in its place. Now, as the afternoon wears away, there is a ripple of anticipation in the air. Hannibal savors it, revels in the set of Will’s shoulders, the shadow in his eyes and the knife-sharp energy filling him with purpose.

I’m going to watch you kill.

Will cuts the engine and sits for a moment, staring up at the house of Garrett Jacob Hobbs. The shadow in his chest is restless, pacing and growling, anticipating blood.

He’s in the right place.

A twinge in his forehead reminds him that he needs to take another heat suppressant. It’s a balancing act – stay on the pills for too long and he’ll likely die of liver failure from a toxic buildup of hormones in his system. Come off the pills and not only will he suffer with migraines and hallucinations as he detoxes, but he’ll go into heat, strong and fast and utterly uncontrollable. If he isn’t with an Alpha during it, he knows there’s a good chance he won’t survive. And if he is – because, let’s face it, any Alpha within a fifty-mile radius will be able to sense him if he gets to that point and they’ll come running – then he’ll emerge afterwards, bonded and *owned*. No longer free to be himself. To have a job or a life or…

His hands tremble as he pops two pills from the bottle. He doesn’t even think about the dose; just knocks them back and swallows them dry.

Refuses to look at Hannibal, who has raised an eyebrow at him. He kicks the car door open and heads up the path.

I’m in charge of my own life.

Left behind, Hannibal glances down at the offending bottle of heat suppressants. He’s going to have to get rid of them.

A problem for another day. Right now, he’s curious to see how Will fares against Garrett Jacob Hobbs. This house is owned by an Alpha – he can smell it. He’s curious to know whose shadow-self is stronger – Garrett’s or Will’s.

Which of them is going to die?

As Will nears the door, Hannibal hears scrambling footsteps. It opens and Hobbs flings his dying wife out of the house, distracting Will for long enough that he can withdraw back inside.

The woman's throat has been cut; a gaping slit pulsing blood from the severed artery. She is already dead; her body just needs to realize it. Hannibal stays back, watching as Will bloodies his hands as he tries to hold the flesh together, desperate to save her even as the light fades from her eyes.

No!

Will's darkness roars up, overwhelming him with its fury. Venom makes him bare his teeth and Hannibal quivers with excitement as the Omega draws his gun and smashes open the door.

That's it, Will… Hunt him down… Kill him…

'Garrett Jacob Hobbs! FBI!'

Will keeps the gun up, acid pounding through his veins as he follows the Alpha's rut-rich scent to the kitchen. Hears desperate whimpers and a growl rumbles in his throat.

Outside, Hannibal pauses to consider dead Mrs Hobbs. There is no elegance in her death; no meaning, just a scared Alpha with no care for his mate.

Will enters the kitchen and sees Garrett with his daughter in his arms. He's behind her, holding a knife to her throat, ready to take her life if it will save his own. He points his gun at Garrett's head in warning. His eyes flash gold and he can *feel* his shadow pulling his finger on the trigger.

Kill him… Do it now…

Protocol says he gives him a chance. He has to disable him… He can't kill unless a life is in danger…

And then Hobbs drags the blade across his daughter's creamy white throat and her skin splits, spraying gouts of blood across the room as she gasps and chokes.

I can kill you now.

He's firing before he's even finished the thought. He's not himself, not really. He's *nothing*. No one… Just darkness…

Garrett takes a shot to the shoulder and that's enough to knock him back a step, but the Alpha is in full rut, his eyes blazing red, and he goes for his daughter again even as she falls to the ground. And Will's killing him, pumping round after round after round into his chest, coming after him until the clip is empty and Garrett's chest and abdomen are riddled with bullets.

Hannibal wets his lips as the taste of copper fills the air. Hears gunshots and steps into the doorway to see Hobbs in the corner of the kitchen.

'See?'

The Alpha's sibilant whisper is the last thing he says, and Hannibal watches as his head drops. He's dead. Killed by an Omega. A powerful and *unique* Omega.

But Will is distressed. Shaking with the effort of not crying. Beneath the choking Beta spray. Hannibal can smell the waves of Omega pheromones coming from him, laced with gunpowder and blood. He's crouched on the floor, cradling the split neck of Hobbs's daughter.

Hannibal considers them for a moment. He cares nothing for the girl, but there is something desperate, pleading, in the way that Will is trying to save her. The Omega is not yet ready to know himself, to accept that he can take great satisfaction from taking a life, irrespective of saving a life.

I shall have to convince you, Will.

Hannibal approaches and drops to his knees, heedless of the blood soaking into his tailored trousers. He pushes Will's hands away and cups the girl's neck to stem the flow.

He doesn't speak. He doesn't have to. He radiates a sense of calm authority and Will responds to it. Submits to it. *Thanks him for it*.

Hannibal's darkness reaches out for Will's, tenderly caressing it in the broken silence between them. Will is a fledgling monster, curled between the legs of a mighty dragon, and Hannibal locks eyes with the Omega, giving him a small nod, swallowing when it is returned.

You are mine, Will, he thinks. *You just don't know it, yet.*

***

After giving his statement and going back to his hotel room to change, Will returns to the hospital. He needs to see her… He needs to see… He just needs to know.

Abigail Hobbs, the daughter of the man he killed. He's responsible for her, now.

Born in blood.

His heart is racing. His breath comes in short bursts. His body hums as though there's a live wire beneath his skin. He sees the number; the open doorway… Hears the blip of a steady heart on the machine.

And *then*, cutting through the tang of antiseptic, of metallic blood and Abigail's Beta scent, is the smell of cedarwood and musk. It fills the room, warming it. Will stops at the end of the bed, releasing a long, slow breath when he sees him. His Alpha…

Oh…

Hannibal is asleep in the chair beside Abigail, holding her hand. She's unconscious, on a ventilator, her heartbeat slow and steady. She can't feel it, but the message – *I'm here, I won't leave you. I'll protect you* – is clear.

I want him to hold me that way…

Will can feel his heart constrict and he sinks into the chair on the other side of the bed because he *knows*… It's not for Abigail… Hannibal's protecting her for *Will*.

A lump forms in his throat and Will struggles to swallow at what this means… At what this *might* mean…

You… like me…?

He looks over at the sleeping Alpha, his lips and fingers tingling. Hannibal's face, normally so guarded, is soft and vulnerable. An odd mixture of sharp angles and thin lips, he shouldn't be so handsome, but he's breathtaking. His sandy hair falls over his forehead and Will wonders if it feels as soft as it looks…

How would it feel to run his fingers through it? To wrap his hands in it and hold tight as Hannibal's body moves on top of him, holding him to a broad chest and…

His breath catches and he feels a trickle of slick dampen his boxers. Heat crawls up his spine, settling, iron hot, at the nape of his neck.

Fuck.

I like you, too, Dr Lecter…

***

Amuse-bouche

Chapter Summary

> The FBI are hunting a new serial killer, one who is growing mushrooms from his victims, and Will must confront Dr Lecter again when Jack sends him for therapy. But his feelings for the Alpha are growing stronger, confusing him and dredging up bad memories from his past.

Chapter Notes

> Hi everyone! Thank you SO MUCH for all the wonderful feedback! Finally, Chapter 2 is finished. I can't WAIT for the proper fluff and stuff to happen, but it's a slow hunt so we take what we can get.
>
> WARNING: Memory scene (non-canon) includes attempted rape/non-con. Please skip if you don't want to read this sort of thing. xxx

Shell casings clatter to the floor. The revolver jumps in his hands, bruising his palms and jarring his elbows. Will pumps round after round into him, but Hobbs keeps coming. Blank, dead eyes staring into him, teeth bared in a vicious smirk, air whistling through shredded lungs.

See? See?

The whisper gets inside him. His shadow uncurls, swelling until it fills his chest. Oozes through his veins, trickles into the spaces between his thoughts until it’s all he sees. All he is.

See?

Will wakes with a jerk, his neck cramped and jaw tight from grinding his teeth. Jack knocks again, leaning down and staring into the car as if he can wake Will with the sheer force of his gaze.

‘We’re here!’ he booms.

‘Here’ is Garrett Jacob Hobbs’ hunting cabin. The forensic team stay outside, gathering samples and dusting for fingerprints. Jack leads Will inside, latex-blue hands casually turning over and tossing aside useless evidence.

Will's skin prickles. Something very bad happened here. Several somethings. Violence leaves an imprint on a place, like a stain, and Will can *see* the spatters and smears across the chipped wood floor and up the walls. It pinches and slaps at his skin until he feels beaten. Why isn't he bruised on the outside, too?

The stairs creak under his weight as he ascends. The loft hums with residual emotions and, for just a second, Will falters. Sways and his head spikes with pain as his stomach roils. It's too much… And yet…

He picks his way across the floor, drawn to the antlers. Anger… Hate… He expects to pick up on these lingering feelings from Hobbs… But somewhere in the middle of the swarm of darkness, Will can sense… *love*. He *loved* these girls… Even as he was killing them. *Honored* them…

A sound behind him, a musky Alpha scent and Will is wrenched from his mind. Jack comes up behind him and Will moves away, hiding a shiver.

'Could be a permanent installation in your Evil Minds Museum,' he says. He can't help it. Jack's presence is annoying him today. Sets his teeth on edge. He wants to be here with… Alone. He wants to be here *alone*. If he has to be, that is.

And the self-righteous Alpha just *has* to point out that what they learn here will help them catch the next one like Hobbs.

He's right. Will knows he's right, but he's just… tense. He hasn't been sleeping. Not surprising, given that he's spending every night in the hospital with Abigail. And then Will, who has only had one ear on the conversation, realizes what Jack just said.

'Abigail Hobbs is a *suspect*?' he scoffs.

Jack pierces Will with his stare and Will shifts, uncomfortable under the scrutiny. Does he *know* Will's been watching over Abigail? Knowing Jack he does, which would concern him… And this is his way of voicing that concern. Another twinge of anger and Will can feel heartburn starting to creep up his throat. He isn't some damn *Omega* who needs coddling.

'We've been conducting house-to-house interviews at the Hobbs residence, and, at this property also,' Jack says, still inspecting Will for – what? Will doesn't know. 'Hobbs spent a lot of time here… Spent a lot of time with his *daughter* here… She would make the ideal bait, wouldn't she?'

It's too much. Will needs fresh air. He needs out of this conversation. He needs Ha-… He needs some space. He bits his lip, rolling his eyes at Jack's persistence.

'Hobbs killed alone,' he snaps, wildly casting around for something, *anything* that he can give to Jack to distract him. A long, curling red hair on the floor catches his eye and his chest swoops. Yes! 'Ah…' He crouches down and gently lifts the hair from the dusty floor, holding it up to his flashlight. 'Someone else was here…'

And fifty dollars says it's Freddie fucking Lounds.

***

He can do this. He can do this…

Will's hands are damp and shaking. He adjusts his glasses, giving himself a moment and taking a deep, calming breath before walking into his lecture theatre. Almost immediately, the room erupts into a thunderstorm of clapping and Will tastes bile. His shadow rears up, slashing through him at the praise, and he has to use all of his willpower to keep it at bay. He doesn't like how it makes him feel… How *hungry* it makes him. How proud.

'Thank you… Please, stop that.'

The order comes out sharp and many of the students' faces fall as their applause dies off and they sit back down. Will ignores the muttered grumblings. If they knew they'd just been clapping for an *Omega*, they'd be furious. As it is, they think they're clapping for the heroic Beta who stopped Garrett Jacob Hobbs from murdering any more innocent victims.

They're clapping because Will *murdered* Hobbs.

Will presses his controller and the first slide pops up on the screen.

'This is how I caught Garrett Jacob Hobbs,' Will says. He slips one hand into his pocket, closing tight around the little can of Beta pheromone spray, and turns to his captive audience. 'It's his resignation letter. Does anybody see the clue?'

Several students raise a hand, some with unfounded confidence. Will bites back the derisive snort he wants to make and settles for a small frown, hoping his eyes don't flash bright gold with anger.

'There isn't one,' he says coldly. 'He wrote a letter; he left a phone number, no address. That's it.' *Click*. The next slide is a photo of Hobbs, shot dead with ten holes in his chest in his kitchen. Will doesn't turn, just leans back against his desk. 'Bad bookkeeping and dumb luck.'

Several of the students emit quiet huffs of amazement. Their awe is cloying; it sticks to Will's skin like a bad aftershave and makes him want to scrub himself raw. They have no idea who he really is. *What* he really is. What he's capable of.

Something about the image catches his eye. He turns. He's there, in the kitchen, hands slippery with blood as he tries to stem the boiling flow from Abigail's neck. Her flesh splits away from him and he can *feel* her thumping artery against his finger. He can't do this. He can't do this alone. He needs help. He needs –

Will turns back to the class. They are silent again, waiting for him to say something undoubtedly profound.

He *needs* to keep talking. Presses his controller again. *Click.* A safer slide. One of the family photos. Hobbs and Abigail on a hunting trip together. Bright-eyed, smiling. An all-American dream.

‘Garrett Jacob Hobbs is dead,’ he continues. ‘The question *now* is how to stop those his story is going to inspire.’ *Click*. The last slide. ‘He’s already got *one* admirer. A *copycat*.’ He can’t keep the disdain from his voice, and finally turns to look up at the blasphemous display. Jarringly wrong. Brutal… And yet he can’t help but see a kind of elegance in the way she is displayed. The flow of her limbs and the way her head looks thrown back… *Lost to pleasure*...

Will turns to his notes on Hobbs’ profile and gives himself a mental shake to clear away the perverse thoughts.

He has work to do.

***

At the end of the lesson, a student with cropped hair hovers at his desk, trying to catch his attention. Will busies himself packing away, thrumming with tension but exhausted. He feels ripped in different directions, and all he wants to do is sink into a hot bath and then fall into bed and sleep for weeks. He keeps his head down and ignores her until she sulks away and joins her friend on their way out.

A familiar perfume tickles his nose and he glances up as a Beta woman dressed in a red skirt and monochrome blouse stops before him. Will glances up and feels his shoulders drop an inch. Dr Alana Bloom, an old colleague and friend, smiles at him. She is the Beta responsible for buying his pheromone spray and she helped him get the job at Quantico in the first place.

She’s beautiful. Tumbling brown hair, clear blue eyes and delicate features. Though, right now, those features are arranged into an expression of careful neutrality. Will knows that look and continues to pack up so that he can escape before she tries to offer him comfort or, even worse, therapy.

‘Hi.’

‘How are you, Will?’

Shit. He can’t do it. He can’t lie to her or fake it. His body caves in on itself and he ends up giving her this sort of half-choking sob of a laugh, his smile more of a grimace as his eyes betray him, sparkling gold behind his glasses.

‘Heh… I have no idea,’ he laughs, hating how much his voice shakes when he says that. But Alana has always been able to see right through him. Until Hannibal, she was the only one who could…

Alana looks uncomfortable, and for a split second, Will thinks it’s his fault. Then she speaks, and she sounds guilty.

‘Well, I didn’t want you to be ambushed…’

‘This is an ambush?’ Will teases, but Alana ploughs on.

‘Ambush is later. Immediately later. Soon-to-now.’ Over her shoulder, Will sees an all-too-familiar Alpha striding towards them, all furrowed brow and hulking shoulders. Alana’s words tumble over each other in their haste to get out. ‘When Jack arrives, consider yourself ambushed.’

‘Here’s Jack,’ Will says, and gives a small shake of his head as Jack frowns at Alana for tipping Will off.

‘How’s class?’ Jack asks, moving his head to direct the question at Will at the last minute. Will begins packing up again. He is *not* in the mood for an Alpha-intervention right now. He needs to get home. Feed his dogs. Scrub Garrett Jacob Hobbs from his retinas…

‘They applauded. It was inappropriate.’

‘Well, the review board would beg to differ. You’re up for a commendation.’ Will meets Jack’s eye just long enough to show how *not interested* he is in such bullshit. ‘And they’ve, er, okayed active return to the field.’

So, this is the *real* reason why he’s here. Will doesn’t have a response, but Alana is already jumping in, so it doesn’t matter right now.

‘*Question is,* do you *wanna* go back to the field?’

Does he? Will doesn’t know. To be regularly exposed to anger and violence… To become a target again…

‘*I* want him back in the field,’ Jack says, turning to Alana and drawing himself up to his full height to intimidate her into submission. Will quirks an eyebrow at the steely expression on Alana’s face. For a Beta… Well, she may as well have been born an Alpha for her ferocity, *especially* with regards to Will’s wellbeing. Before Alana can reply, however, Jack speaks again. ‘And I’ve told the board I’m recommending a full psych eval.’

His remark kicks Will in the gut. He can’t catch his breath. Panic claws at his throat and all he can think to choke out is,

‘Are we starting *now*?’ Because that would make sense; Alana is a psychologist. She knows him well… Has she been *evaluating* him – spying on him – all along?

‘Oh, the session wouldn’t be with me,’ Alana says quickly. It’s like she’s *scared* of upsetting Will. Poor, fragile Will. Vulnerable, emotional little Omega.

‘Hannibal Lecter’s a better fit,’ Jack says, heedless of Will’s discomfort. ‘Your relationship’s not personal.’

At this, Will’s heart constricts. Again, it’s like a kick. Not personal?

Of course it’s not a personal relationship. Why would it be? Why would that thought even upset him…? *Because*, the shadow whispers, *you like Hannibal*.

Does he? Or was that the fleeting thought of an emotionally-ravaged and exhausted Omega looking for comfort in the wrong place?

Jack is still speaking. 'But if you are more comfortable with Dr. Bloom –'

'No.' Will glares at them both. He doesn't even care if his eyes *are* rimmed with gold right now. 'I'm not going to comfortable with *anybody* inside my head.'

But the thought of *Hannibal*… Should he accept? Does he *want* to see him again?

'You've never killed anyone before, Will,' Alana says. She's speaking gently. Trying to reason with him. Trying to gentle him. Speaking to him as though he's being a bad-tempered Omega. 'It's a deadly force encounter. It's a lot to digest.'

Will grips the handles of his briefcase tight, willing some semblance of control back to his body. He has to go. This isn't a good conversation to be having at the end of the day, when his spray is wearing off and he's due another dose of suppressants. He can feel his gut churning, a trickle of heat irritating the back of his neck.

'I used to work Homicide,' he points out, making a beeline for the exit door. Jack jumps on this straight away, and turns after him.

'The reason you *currently* used to work Homicide is because you didn't have the stomach for pulling the trigger. You just pulled the trigger ten times!'

Alana flinches at the way he's raising his voice, but Will is proud of the fact that, although he stops dead in his tracks and turns to face the Alpha, he doesn't lower his head or bow down in submission. Instead, he latches onto something in the way Jack said that.

'Wait, so a psych eval *isn't* a formality?'

Jack grimaces at being caught out, but he's not one to back down. Just takes it in his stride and keeps coming.

'No, it's so I can get some sleep at night. I asked you to get close to the Hobbs thing. I need to know you didn't get too close.' *He knows*. *He knows about the shadow*, Will thinks, panic gagging him again. Jack tilts his head. He knows he's got him. Will can see the gleam in his dark eyes. 'How many nights did you spend in Abigail Hobbs' hospital room, Will?' Jack asks, soft but deadly. Alana's blue eyes flick from Jack to Will. She looks… sad…? Disappointed?

Fuck you, Jack, Will thinks, glaring at him as he grinds his teeth together. *Fuck. You*.

Out loud, he deflects with his typical, 'Therapy doesn't work on me,' and bows his head, avoiding eye contact and feeling the weight of Jack's disapproval bear down on him as the Alpha steps right up into his personal space and dominates the air around him.

'Therapy doesn't work on you because you won't *let* it,' Jack says quietly, his breath shifting Will's hair with how close he's standing. It's a dirty tactic; Will can't help but inhale his scent, his pheromones, and this close it's all he can do to stay upright. All he can do to keep

from sniffing and nodding and giving in to what Jack wants, and ask for a hug, a touch, any small measure of comfort afterwards.

‘And because I know all the tricks,’ Will mutters, rasping the words out past the submission clogging his throat. His tongue is heavy; he won’t be able to speak again until he’s washed Jack’s scent off him. Once again, being betrayed by his own body.

Jack glances back at Alana, looking for support.

‘Well, perhaps you need to *un-learn* some tricks,’ he says, shrugging one shoulder. Alana, perhaps sensing how close Will is to surrendering, knowing how angry and betrayed he’d be, jumps in with one final *reasonable* request. A good little Beta, acting as a go-between for an Alpha and a stroppy Omega.

‘Why not have a *conversation* with Hannibal?’ she asks, her voice deliberately soothing. ‘He was there. He knows what you went through.’

He doesn’t know. He can’t know. He’s not an Omega, Will thinks desperately. He can feel tears pricking his eyes. No. No, he can’t cry. Not here. Not in front of Jack. Not in front of Alana. He has to go. Lock himself inside a toilet cubicle until this feeling goes away. This feeling of needing to be held, needing to be protected.

Jack breathes out and Will wrenches himself into action. Ducks his head even lower and strides as fast as he can away from the furious Alpha. As he rounds the corner, he hears Jack shout after him,

‘Come on, Will. I need my beauty sleep!’

Will breaks into a run and darts into the first toilet he can find. Locks the door with shaking hands and falls onto the toilet seat, his legs going out from under him and arms like jelly. That was too close. Far too close.

Fumbling to pull the can of Beta spray from his pocket, he holds his breath and gives himself a liberal coating. Shakes the aerosol and swears under his breath because it’s running really low and that means he’ll need to ask Alana to buy him some more.

He stays there for a while, resting his sweaty forehead against the cold tile wall, waiting for his racing heart to slow down. For the strength to returns to his muscles.

‘Fuck you, Jack,’ he whispers, clenching and unclenching his fists. Jack always gets what he wants because he’s an Alpha, and Alphas always get what they want because, in the end, Omegas are biologically designed to please them.

Will pinches the bridge of his nose, his head pounding and stomach churning. Is he excited or nervous?

He’s going to see Hannibal again.

For therapy.

***

Hannibal's office is exactly as Will expects; all dark wood paneling and a high ceiling, tall windows flanked by long curtains and a grand fireplace dominating the far wall. The floor is buffed to a high shine, an ocean of grey wood circling thick rugs. Hannibal's desk rises from the center of the room, pristinely neat and unmarred by sentimental clutter. There is a simple brass lamp, books, tissues and a clock. All functional; useful. Earning their place in Hannibal's presence. The leather chair sits empty; Hannibal stands apart from his furniture, face upturned so that he can track Will's movement on the mezzanine library.

Will knows he's lurking. Hiding. He tries to distract himself by examining the rows of leather-bound journals and psychology textbooks filling the shelves; as far from intense gaze and inscrutable expression as he can be. Has Hannibal read all of these, he wonders, tracing the gilded letters marking a first edition of Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*. It wouldn't surprise him to find that he had.

Everything about this room is as elegant and sophisticated as Hannibal himself, and Will feels despicably shabby with his uncombed hair, cream cotton pants and plaid shirt shedding dog hairs with every step.

He hasn't seen him for days. Not since the hospital. He'd woken with a start in the afternoon, flushing when he realized his head had tipped back and he must have been snoring. Hannibal's coat had been draped over him, acting as a blanket to ward off the chill of the room, but there was no sign of Hannibal himself. The monitors around Abigail continued to beep, gently lulling him back into a fitful doze, and when he'd stirred again in the evening, both Hannibal and his coat had gone.

Garrett Jacob Hobbs had spent every night since whispering in Will's ear, honeyed words slithering inside his skull as his shadow pulsed to the beat of his heart. He'd dreamed of the deer, the black stag, lowering its antlered head to consider him with its obsidian eyes…

A rustle catches his attention. Will turns, hands deep in his trouser pockets, and sees Hannibal looking up at him with a piece of paper in his hands.

'What's that?' he asks.

'Your psychological evaluation,' Hannibal replies, voice as calm and smooth as ever. 'You are totally functional, and more or less sane. Well done.'

Despite his unease and frustration at this whole situation, Will finds himself wanting to grin. Is Hannibal teasing him, or is he serious?

'Did you just… rubber stamp me?' he asks. He has to be sure. Hannibal's small smirk and the quirk of his eyebrow sends a strange swoop through his chest. Makes him need to clear his throat and shuffle his feet.

'Yes,' Hannibal says. 'Jack Crawford may lay his weary head to rest knowing he didn't break you, and our conversation can proceed unobstructed by paperwork.'

Will fights a snort and abandons the books to pace the length gallery, trying to walk off some of his nervous energy. He's never felt so off-kilter as he does when he's around Hannibal. The other man still wants to talk to him? Why? And why does that thought make his neck tingle?

'*Jack* thinks that I need therapy,' he drawls, allowing some of his anger to add a bite to the words. He's still angry about Jack's underhanded way of getting him here. He *hates* that he's so powerless against him.

'What you *need* is a way out of dark places when Jack sends you there,' Hannibal replies. He slides his report back between the pages of a notebook and returns to his scrutiny of Will. The Omega is clearly uncomfortable. He feels vulnerable for having slept in Hannibal's presence, despite the fact that Hannibal had slept in his. Will's scent is choked by an unusual amount of Beta pheromone spray today, and the tremble in his hand suggests that he has been taking his heat suppressants too frequently. Hannibal wonders what Will is trying to hide from him; why he has put so much distance between them since the hospital.

'Hm. Last time he sent me into a dark place, I brought something back,' Will says, more to himself than to Hannibal. He scuffs his boot on the carpet, his mind drifting away from the office, across the city and into Abigail's hospital room. Hannibal's voice grounds him again.

'A surrogate daughter?'

At the odd turn of phrase, Will frowns at him. Hannibal puts his hands inside the silk-lined pockets of his suit trousers, mirroring the younger man's stance. He rests his weight back, feeling the muscles flex in his neck as he stares up at the fretful Omega. Will may be taking heat suppressants, but his body is made for reproduction; how will he respond to such an insinuation, he wonders. Will it spark in him something nurturing, or will he deny it as he does all of his other instincts?

Will doesn't know what to say. He stares down at Hannibal, thrown back to that first night, when he'd walked into Abigail's room to find Hannibal dozing in the chair, holding the girl's hand to protect and comfort her. He feels sweat prick his forehead as he remembers the emotions that overwhelmed him as he sat and stared at Hannibal's sleeping face…

I like you…

Hannibal can see the cogs whirring in Will's mind. He is trying to quell the physiological response at the use of the word 'daughter'. Interesting. To give Will a break, Hannibal turns to his desk and begins to busy himself by tidying it up. He continues to speak, however.

'You saved Abigail Hobbs' life. You also orphaned her. That comes with certain emotional obligations, regardless of *biological disorders*.' Referring to Will's Omega body as a disorder makes Hannibal's throat tighten, but he suppresses his instincts for the sake of playing along. For now. As expected, Will responds favorably to this term.

'You were there. You saved her life too. Do you feel obligated?' he asks.

Hannibal takes the opportunity to look up again, tracing the sharp line of Will's jaw, the dark eyebrows and wide, searching eyes. So much vulnerability in that face, and yet Hannibal can

see traces of Will's darkness even now. He chooses to be honest with him.

'Yes,' he replies. 'I feel a staggering amount of obligation. I feel responsibility. I've fantasized about scenarios where my actions may have allowed a different fate for Abigail Hobbs.'

Will's breath catches, and he can feel the irregular rhythm of his pulse at his throat. Hannibal's voice, normally so calm and controlled, is quivering with restrained emotion. He reminds Will of a storm – fury and beautiful violence locked up behind dark eyes and an unsettling smile.

Why does he feel calmer? Why does he want to climb down the ladder and sit with Hannibal? Talk with him until the hour is up.

He's speaking before he even realizes he's voicing his thoughts out loud.

'Jack thinks Abigail Hobbs helped her dad kill those girls.'

Hannibal considers Will. Smiles to himself as he asks a question to get under Will's skin.

'How does that make you feel?'

As expected, Will reacts to this stereotypical line of questioning. However, he seems to think Hannibal is teasing him – perhaps a part of him is – and he smiles, throwing the question back at him.

'How does it make *you* feel?'

The wall is still there, but Hannibal can see a hint of a crack. Will needs him to be honest with him first. Needs Hannibal to be vulnerable first, so that he can trust him.

I will make you trust me, Will.

'I find it vulgar,' he says.

'Me too,' Will replies.

'And entirely possible,' Hannibal adds. Up on the gallery, Will shakes his head.

'It's not what happened.'

Hannibal lifts one shoulder in a small shrug. It does not matter to him.

'Jack will ask her when she wakes up, or he'll have one of us ask her.'

God. The idea of Jack sending Will to Abigail's hospital room, to shake her awake and immediately ask her if she helped her father kill and eat a half dozen girls her own age… He leans on the balustrade to support himself.

'Is this therapy, or a support group?' he asks, huffing out a nervous laugh.

To his surprise, Hannibal takes his question seriously, and gazes intently up at him. There is a strand between them, quivering and golden; understanding. Acceptance.

‘It’s whatever you need it to be,’ Hannibal murmurs. Will nods to himself, surprised that the thought of having ‘whatever he needs’ sessions with Hannibal to be… comforting.

He can’t. He shouldn’t.

Hannibal speaks again, shutting Will out of his thoughts before they can consume him. He wants Will’s full attention on him.

‘Will, the mirrors in your mind *can* reflect the best of yourself, not the worst of someone else.’

Will stares down, his heart squeezing an extra, painful, beat into his chest as Hannibal speaks directly at the shadow in him.

You know me.

***

Shots ring out. The target sways in the breeze caused by the bullets, but most of them miss. It’s not a dream this time. Will’s palms are aching but his grip never falters. With the headphones on, he can’t hear the clack of approaching heels, but his visitor hangs back until Will empties the clip and removes his mufflers.

When Beverly Katz speaks, her voice sends light shivers up and down Will’s spine. She’s an Alpha, but she has a calm, quiet energy that doesn’t rattle him the way Jack’s does. It helps that she doesn’t know he’s an Omega – Jack hasn’t shared that with anyone – so her concern for him is because she thinks he’s a socially anxious Beta. He prefers it that way.

‘I’m pretty sure firearm accuracy isn’t a prerequisite for teaching,’ she says, coming up behind him and crossing her arms to review his work as Will lifts the barrier and calls the target towards him.

‘Well, I’ve been in the field before,’ Will says, speaking absently as he frowns at his shoddy gunmanship.

‘Now you’re back in the saddle. Yeesh.’

Will snorts a small agreement.

‘Yeesh indeed. Took me ten shots to drop Hobbs.’

Beverly grins, watching as Will removes the used target and replaces it with a fresh one.

‘Zeller wanted to give you the bullets he pulled out of Hobbs in an acrylic case, but I told him you wouldn’t think it was funny,’ she says. Will smiles at her over his shoulder.

‘Probably not.’

‘I suggested one of those clackin’ swingin’ ball things.’

Will considers. Imagines it on Hannibal’s desk, and then smirks, giving a little half-shoulder shrug.

‘*That* would’ve been funny.’

They both slot their headphones back over their ears, blocking out the surrounding sound. In the vacuum, Will can only hear his breathing, in and out, and the steady thud of his heart. He lines himself up again, adjusting his weight, planting his feet apart and raising the gun. Beverly considers him, narrowing her slanted eyes, raising her voice so that Will can make it out through the protectors.

‘You’re a Weaver. I took you for an isosceles guy.’

Will hears the way his heart skips a beat at that. He swallows, his Adam’s apple bobbing nervously.

‘I have a rotator cuff issue so I have to use the Weaver stance,’ he says, his voice shaking. He flinches when Beverly squeezes his shoulders, either side of his neck, his neck where the skin is perfectly smooth until the spot right between his shoulder blades, where it’s severed by a jagged line of scar tissue…

‘You *are* tight,’ she says, giving him a quick massage.

Will swallows again. Hates the way his grip on the gun falters. He can smell concrete dust and motor oil. The heavy, musky scent of an Alpha, sour with sweat and whiskey…

‘I got stabbed when I was a cop,’ he mutters. Tremors run down his body, but Beverly is either oblivious or she’s ignoring it.

‘Yeah?’ she says, her hands still softly holding him in place. ‘I got stabbed in the third grade with a number two pencil. Thought I was gonna get lead poisoning.’

Her teasing eases some of the tension from him. She’s treating him like a normal person. Nothing special. Nothing vulnerable. Will wets his lips, testing his voice again, relieved to find it works, just scratchy.

‘Uh, no lead in pencils; it’s graphite.’

Beverly moves him into an adjusted position and steps back.

‘See if that helps with the recoil.’

Will flexes his neck, takes a breath and then unloads the clip, round after round after round after round, into the target. Seven of the shots hit true and he smiles with relief when he lowers the guards again.

‘That was better. You come all the way down here to teach me how to shoot?’

Beverly smiles up at him, catching his eye. Will keeps his visor on; the yellow will counteract his gold rims.

‘No,’ the Alpha says. ‘Jack sent me down here to find out what you know about gardening.’

***

The forest air of Elk Neck State Park is heavy with the sweet, sickly stench of rot. Will swallows the urge to gag, picking his way across the mulch as Jack leads him to the mushroom garden. He can feel the rhythm of the killer, a slow ripple through the air, whispering between the leaves overhead. The forest should be peaceful – all the yellow tape, officers and forensic investigators are polluting it.

‘So, Lecter gave you the all-clear,’ Jack says, a hint of smug satisfaction in his gravelly voice. ‘Therapy might work on you after all.’

Will grinds his back teeth, concentrating on where his boots are sinking into the damp earth.

‘Therapy is an *acquired taste*,’ he mutters. ‘Which I have *yet* to acquire. But it served your purpose. I’m back in the field.’

They stop before the row of unearthed bodies, each in varying states of decay, and Jack’s preliminary comments about the perimeter give way to Price and Zeller trading thoughts with Beverly Katz. They’re both Betas, so there’s always an undertone of quiet respect for the more senior Alpha, but Will knows that Beverly has worked hard to earn that respect – it’s not just because of her biology.

Jack lets Will skate his eyes over the disturbed bodies and then, when he senses the Omega’s energy change, a subtle tightening of his shoulders, a coldness to his blank face, he ushers everyone else away. Will’s becoming the killer… He needs space.

A hush falls over the forest. Will can *feel* the killer’s memories humming in the air. He backtracks, retracing his steps to the edge of the garden and then closes his eyes. Listens to the heavy thud of his heart. Feels the way the breeze caresses his hair…

He’s no-one. Someone. Not him… The current rises, a warm river that drags his feet out from under him until he slips away…

The garden is perfect. Undisturbed. He has dug a hole and placed his most recent source of nourishment inside. Skin mottled blue with cold. Pale lips. Shriveled genitals. The perfect host.

‘I do not bind his arms or legs as I bury him in a shallow grave.’

His voice is flat. Empty. He’s not really there – not anywhere. A conduit for the memories, nothing more.

His shadow slithers through his veins, winding itself like a snake around his heart, growing with every beat.

‘He’s alive,’ Will continues. ‘But he will never be conscious again.’ He shovels earth onto the body, the rich smell filling his nostrils. Beautiful. ‘He won’t know that he’s dying. I don’t need him to. This is my design.’

His shadow swells, constricting his lungs. Choking him. Will stares down into the grave, into the milky white eyes of Garrett Jacob Hobbs. He’s burying him. He shot him, tore up his body with tiny pieces of metal, and now he’s going to transform him… *See?*

The image flickers. Fades. The fungus-coated body jerks awake, wild eyes flying open as a lipless mouth opens wide in a silent scream. Will falls back, his shadow exploding into pale wisps as fear overwhelms him. He can *feel* the victim’s pain, his confusion… His body is a twisted web of spores, his organs sucked dry and muscles torn as the mushrooms force their way through him.

An officer runs over.

‘Don’t touch him! Oh my God! Oh my God!’

Will scrambles to his feet and backs away, wiping mud onto his jeans with shaking hands. His eyes are aching, hot with tears he knows he can’t cry. His skin is crawling. He feels electrocuted. He needs to be at home, dragging blankets and sheets into a nest on the floor, curling around his dogs and waiting until Ha-… Until he feels better.

He hurries from the scene, shaking his head in response to Jack’s questioning look.

He can’t do this.

***

Striding into Hannibal’s office that evening, Will thrusts the psych eval onto the desk.

‘This may have been… *premature*.’

His voice is wobbling, but he’s proud that he managed to speak at all. During the drive over here, he tried to imagine how he would tell Dr Lecter that he wasn’t ready; that it was too painful.

I’m not strong enough.

Every time he tried to take a breath, sharp pain would seal his throat and he would have to settle for tightening his hands until the steering wheel creaked, his knuckles white under thin skin.

Hannibal’s office is warm; a fire crackles in the hearth, casting dancing shadows across the walls. Will crosses his arms, leaning back against Hannibal’s drawing table and putting distance between them. A flush creeps up his neck, coloring his cheeks. He is creating a wall of space.

Hannibal’s brows flicker into a momentary frown and then he smooths out his expression again. Calculated neutrality. Will is upset – he tries to hide his fear with defensive anger, but

he is shaking and his breath catches in his throat. As deadened as his scent is – he must be bathing in the Beta spray now – Hannibal's sensitive nose can pick up traces of salty and spice – an Omega in distress. He evaluates his own body's natural response; the urge to wrap Will in his arms and hold him tight, make him feel small and safe and protected…

Will's suppression of every instinct is intoxicating – Hannibal finds himself staring into the Omega's face, urging him to look up. To meet his gaze.

'What did you see? Out in the field,' he asks.

'Hobbs,' Will says, his voice trembling.

'An association?'

'A hallucination,' Will admits. He slips his hand into his pocket, closing around the spray until he's certain he's dented the can. 'I saw him lying there in someone else's grave.'

Hannibal tilts his head, considering him for a moment. Will turns his head away, his jaw clenching and unclenching as he waits to hear how fucked up he is.

'Did you tell Jack what you saw?' Hannibal asks quietly. He hopes not. He *wants* Will out in the field – unstable means breakable, and breakable means *malleable*. He can be influenced to accept the darkness inside him; embrace it and nurture it. Who *knows* what will be unleashed?

'*No*.' Will confirms Hannibal's suspicion. The Omega feels a great sense of guilt for the murder of Garett Jacob Hobbs; not for killing him, but for *enjoying* it. An excellent start. Aloud, Hannibal says dismissively,

'It's stress. Not worth reporting.' Then, to tug at the barb in Will's heart, he takes a step closer and adds, 'You displaced the victim of another killer's crime with what could arguably be considered *your* victim.'

Will's head snaps up and his eyes flash bright gold with anger. Hannibal feels a tingle low in his gut – satisfaction at provoking Will's dark anger. He closes the gap even more, until his throat gags at the bitter taint of chemical pheromones choking Will's delicate aroma.

'I don't consider Hobbs my victim,' Will snaps. He clamps down on the darkness seeping through him and gets up, moving across to the other desk to put fresh space between them. Having Hannibal so close… It's fogging up his mind. All he can smell is Hannibal's musky scent and cedarwood cologne – all he can see are Hannibal's shoulders and his long, lean legs encased in a sharp grey suit… He doesn't like the way heat chases itself up and down his spine. Doesn't like the way his scalp is tingling.

'What *do* you consider him?' Hannibal asks, following after him, blocking his escape. A thrilling taste of the hunt.

Will huffs a laugh.

‘Dead?’ he offers. He looks away again. Hannibal is so close… Too close. Why is he staring at him so intently?

‘Is it harder imagining the thrill somebody else feels killing, now that you’ve done it yourself?’ Hannibal asks. His words, softly spoken, bury deep inside Will’s chest. His shadow hisses its approval, but Will feels sick. He can’t answer. He closes his eyes, his jaw working furiously.

Flaring his nostrils and wetting his lips, Hannibal tastes the air for Will’s scent. He is very distressed. He could push him further, but his Will is not yet ready to know himself. To know either of them.

‘The arms,’ he continues, steering the conversation back to safer waters. ‘Why did he leave them exposed? To hold their hands? To feel the life leaving their bodies?’

Relief floods Will’s body and he feels muscles grind as his shoulders relax. He even glances up into Hannibal’s face – when did he gets so close again? – before he frowns and considers his killer.

‘No, that’s too esoteric for someone who took the time to bury his victims in a straight line. He’s more practical.’ He speaks absently, thinking aloud. Hannibal leans on the back of a chair, drawing Will’s attention to his face.

‘He was cultivating them,’ he suggests.

‘He was keeping them alive. He was feeding them intravenously.’ Will glances down again, folding his arms, but it’s more of a thoughtful stance this time. Hannibal’s questions and softly spoken statements loosen the cogs in his mind, opening doors to possibilities he hadn’t thought of before. He feels a thrill of excitement as be begins to *understand*.

‘But your farmer let his crops die,’ Hannibal says. ‘Save for the one that didn’t.’

‘Yeah, and the one that didn’t, died on the way to the hospital. Though they weren’t crops; they were the fertilizer. The bodies were covered in fungus.’

Hannibal calls forth his knowledge of biology, skimming through the remembered pages of an article read decades ago.

‘The structure of a fungus mirrors that of the human brain; an intricate web of connections,’ he says, offering an idea and watching with fascination as Will’s eyes begin to light up with realization.

‘So, maybe he admires their ability to connect the way human minds can’t…’ Will glances up and catches Hannibal’s eye. He feels a jolt and liquid heat pools in his belly as Hannibal smiles at him.

‘Yours can.’

There’s something so intimate about the way the Alpha says it – as though he thinks Will is *special* somehow… Will finds himself blushing and coughs out a laugh, his hands shaking as

he struggles to find what to do with his arms. All of a sudden, he feels very, very small, very boxed in and very grubby, standing in Hannibal's plush office with fungus-encrusted boots and mud-smeared jeans.

'Um, yeah, not *physically*.' He's nothing special. Just an empathic Omega. They can all do it, right? He's not unique.

When Will Graham smiles, his entire face lights up, and Hannibal drinks in the sight and savors the beauty of the bashful young man before him.

I will make you trust me, Will.

He steps back, releasing Will so that the Omega can breathe freely. Too much pressure too soon and he will bolt.

'Is that what your farmer is looking for?' he asks, pitching his voice low so that Will has to pay close attention to hear him. 'Some sort of connection?'

Will quivers, nervous eyes darting to and from Hannibal's serene face. Is it just his imagination, or is Hannibal referring to more than just their farmer when he says connection like that?

He pushes up from the desk; he needs to get home, feed the dogs… Take a shower… Glances back at Hannibal again and wants to… What? Go to him? Hannibal hardly strikes him as the sort of Alpha inclined to touch, let alone hold him. And why would Will even want that? He doesn't need comfort. He's *not* weak.

'Have a good evening, Will,' Hannibal says, halting the tirade in its tracks. Will nods and slips out of the side door, pressing his back against it and closing his eyes as he takes a long, shuddering gulp of air. What's happening to him? Why can't he control his emotions around the Alpha?

He fumbles for his bottle of heat suppressants, dry swallowing a tablet. He's probably taking too many, but he needs to get his hormones under control. He can't keep letting Hannibal get to him like this.

One last deep breath and then he runs his fingers through his hair, trying to clear the lingering scent from his nose. Cedarwood and cloves… His stomach jumps and he feels a twitch inside, something he's not felt in a long time. A hunger that he's kept under control for years. Until now.

What are you doing to me, Hannibal?

***

As a dinner guest, Special Agent Jack Crawford is both complimentary and vulgar; heartily tucking into the gourmet cuisine crafted by Hannibal with the same bullish obliviousness with which he treats Will Graham. Jack works in brutish strength and overt dominance. There is nothing elegant or refined about him. An open book, as they say.

Hannibal's eyes tighten a fraction as he serves the main course, but his hands are steady as he drizzles blood-red sauce over the meat.

'Loin, served with a Cumberland sauce of red fruits,' he explains. Moves away and takes his seat across from the other Alpha. Watches with dark satisfaction as Jack cuts a piece of loin and holds it up to his lips, inhaling the delicate scent.

'Mm, loin. What kind?'

'Pork.' The lie trips off his tongue, and Jack is chewing in an instant. Hannibal is more careful with his meal; he takes his time with every bite, complementing the tart sauce with a sip of wine. Perhaps Will would like this dish… Idly, Hannibal wonders if he prefers red or white wine.

'Wonderful,' Jack says. He is trying to savor the delicious food; Hannibal can see his concentration. 'I don't get many opportunities to, er, eat home-cooked meals. My wife and I both work, and, er, as hard as I tried not to, I did wind up marrying my mother.' He chuckles at his own joke, and Hannibal suppresses an eye roll. He needs Jack; needs him to care for Will, and to provide him with more information about the object of his interest. Therefore, he feigns interest and glances up over his fork.

'Your mother didn't cook?'

'She did, she did,' Jack says ruefully. 'I only wish she didn't. There was this meal she used to prepare. She liked to call it "oriental noodles". Spaghetti, soy sauce, bouillon cubes, and spam. I was raised thin as a youngster.'

Hannibal's throat tightens and his stomach turns. The meal sounds positively vile – such bad taste should surely warrant a one-way trip to his larder? Aloud, he cannot resist a private joke.

'Well, next time, bring your wife. I'd love to have you both for dinner.'

Jack smiles, oblivious to the threat, and takes another bite of loin.

'Thank you. *Mmm.* Lovely.' He washes it back with a swig of wine, wiping glistening lips on his napkin before abandoning polite conversation and getting straight to business. Typical Jack. 'So, why do you think Will Graham came back to see you?'

Hannibal contemplates the answer. Allows his mind's eye to wander back to Will's face, the high cheekbones, vulnerable eyes and soft lips… He cuts another slice of meat and chews thoughtfully before answering.

'I'm sure he recognizes the necessity of his own support structure, if he is to go on supporting you in the field,' he says, offering impartiality.

Jack's eyebrows come down; he looks every inch the stereotypical macho Alpha. Not the answer he was expecting, or hoping for. Hannibal feels himself bristle at the display of dominance from the other Alpha, but he calms himself. Now is not the time.

‘Well, I believe that a guy like Will Graham knows *exactly* what’s going on inside of his head, which is why he doesn’t want anyone else up there,’ Jack says. There is the heat of anger in his voice, betraying the sharp note of fear. Ah, yes. Hannibal can see it clearly now.

Jack Crawford feels guilty for treating an Omega so badly. Worries at what he could be unleashing on the world. Have you also seen the shadow inside Will, Jack? Does it scare you?

‘Are you not accustomed to broken ponies in your stable?’ Hannibal speaks lightly, skewing a vegetable and crunching it as he watches his dagger cut deep. Jack’s frown darkens; he abandons his meal to clasp his hands in front of him, leaning forwards with his elbows on the table.

‘You think Will Graham’s a broken pony?’ he rumbles.

Hannibal quirks an eyebrow.

‘I think *you* think Will is a broken pony,’ he says. Leans in slightly. ‘Have you ever lost a pony, Jack?’

The other Alpha stiffens at the insinuation, and Hannibal smirks to himself.

‘If you’re asking me whether or not I’ve ever lost someone in the field, the answer is yes,’ Jack snaps. ‘Why?’

The moment he has been waiting for. Hannibal sets his cutlery down and clasps his own hands together, low down but equally intense. *Come on Jack; tell me what you really think about my Will.*

‘I want to understand why you’re so delicate with Will. Because you don’t trust him, or because you’re afraid of losing another pony?’

Oh, how he *prays* for the former. For Jack to have seen Will’s shadow in his eyes, the same way Hannibal has seen it. To *know* that Will is dangerous, and not just some weak little *Omega* to be used up and discarded.

Frustratingly, Jack simply laughs and begins eating again.

‘I’ve already had my psych eval.’

‘Not by me,’ Hannibal persists. However, he can sense when his hunt is futile, so he smiles and allows the tension to dissipate. He never passes up an opportunity to understand his prey’s vulnerabilities. ‘You’ve already told me about your mother. Why stop there?

Jack laughs. He has *no* idea…

‘Oh, great,’ he chuckles. ‘All right.’ Another bite of loin, washed down with wine. Hannibal settles himself in for a long, tedious evening. ‘Mmm…’

***

Later that night, after driving too fast to get away from Hannibal's office, showering himself raw and then gulping down a bowl of lukewarm soup as his dogs tuck into their food, Will is lying flat on his back in bed, staring up at his ceiling and trying to sleep.

He listens to the thump of his pulse. The faint rasp as he breathes in and out. The creak of tree branches outside and the hoot of owls. The steady breathing and occasional snore of his dogs, lying on the floor around him. Protecting him.

Why can't he *sleep*? Why can't he stop thinking about Hannibal?

The glowing blue numbers on his clock refuse to change. The night is eternal. Will grips his hair tight. His shoulders are aching with tension. He can feel it, crackling like a current underneath his skin.

He needs to come.

Can he? It's been a while since he last tried… Omegas aren't made for solitary orgasms… The last time he managed to come on his own, he ended up depressing himself to the point of tears.

But he *needs* this…

Will bites his lip to muffle his moan as he slips his hand under the waistband of his boxers and touches himself. His balls are aching, hot and heavy against his body, and he's half hard before he's even got a good grip on himself. His breath hitches when he rubs his thumb over the leaking slit at the tip of his cock; the bundle of nerves firing and sending hot pleasure up his spine to settle, iron-hot, in the back of his neck. Is the skin flushed red? Aching to be bitten…

Alone in the dark, slowly stroking the wetness up and down his length, Will's mind wanders back to his last conversation with Hannibal. The words are forgotten; he pictures Hannibal's hands, long fingers and strong thumbs. He can *see* Hannibal; sharp features, thin, cruel lips curving into a hungry smile, dark eyes sparkling and feather-soft, sandy hair falling over a high forehead…

Will arches his back, his hand moving faster now, rubbing himself roughly on the way down, gently up. He slides his free hand around to cup and squeeze his balls, shocked from the fantasy by how wet they are. His body is responding in the way an Omega male *should* – getting ready to be fucked. To take an Alpha's knot. He's slick; his thighs are wet with it, oozing out of him.

Shame is like a bucket of ice water. Will starts to shake, but he can't let go of himself, and the jerking movement is too much. He can imagine Hannibal right in front of him, leaning over him, obsidian eyes boring into him, one hot hand roughly jerking him to completion, the other clamping down on his throat, pinning him.

'Pleasure is the only antidote to pain, Will,' the imagined Hannibal says, silken words flushing Will's cheeks red as his balls tighten up against his body. 'Are you going to come for me?'

‘Yes,’ Will whispers, shaking as he stares up into Hannibal’s face. Into the molten, starving eyes., at the lips hiding teeth that want to rip into him, tear into him. Devour him… *Claim him*… ‘*Yes!*’

He comes hard, spilling hot, sticky cum all over his hands and stomach. His back arches more sharply, grinding his ass down into the damp mattress. He rolls his head back, baring his throat in total submission to his imaginary Alpha, breath coming in sharp, ragged bursts as the last of the white pleasure soaks into his bones.

‘Fuck… *Fuck*…’

Will lies there for several minutes, hands still holding himself, sweaty skin cooling him down as he waits for his heart to slow.

He’s never come so hard on his own before… Maybe he can do this… Maybe…

He smiles sleepily to himself. He’s totally relaxed now, melting into the sheets, not bothered by how scratchy they are as his eyelids grow heavy and pull down. He’s sinking into darkness, riding away as whispers caress his hair and promise violence…

Will finally lets go of himself and rolls onto his side, his hands coated in his own scent, cuddling up to the spare pillow as though it’s Hannibal.

Maybe, if he’s lucky, he won’t have nightmares tonight.

***

He knows it’s a dream, but it doesn’t stop the fear from seeping into him, freezing him in place. It’s a memory; his last night in Homicide…

I should have pulled the trigger… I should have killed you…

‘Police! Samuel Coby – you’re under arrest!’

They burst into the fourth-floor apartment, guns up and ready to fire, just in time to see Coby slash his victim’s throat with a hunting knife. The stolen Omega falls in a sea of crimson, choking on her own blood, panicked hands scrabbling at the wound. Will dashes forwards, holstering his gun in his rush to stem the arterial flow.

‘Stay with me!’ he gasps, trying to squeeze the folds of skin back together, their gold-rimmed eyes locking together. Denise’s face registers a moment of shock at seeing another Omega and then she’s gone, the light fading, leaving behind a blank, glassy expression.

Most of the officers with him are Alphas. They dither, overwhelmed by the violence against an Omega – it’s abhorrent… Some of them are crying.

Samuel Coby has bolted. They hear the crash of breaking glass as he escapes through a window. Will’s shadow bursts through his chest, dragging him to his feet, and he finds himself darting after him, even as the others shout for him to wait.

Coby's footsteps clatter down the metal fire escape. Will races after him and then vaults the railing, his stomach lurching as he drops like a stone. Pain zings up his legs when he lands and his knees buckle. He falls with a yell, rolling to the side and bouncing off a dumpster, his ears ringing from the impact as he takes off after the killer. He has to catch him. He has to kill him–

Stop him. He has to stop him.

'Coby!' he yells, firing a warning shot against the brick wall above Coby's head. Samuel ducks, bringing his arms up to shield himself from raining shards, and ploughs on through the back streets, heading for the train tracks and factories beyond. Will growls under his breath – he could take the shot from here, but he *can't* – and he pushes himself faster, ignoring his burning lungs. 'Coby, *stop*!'

They skid their way over the rough ground and Coby disappears into the shadow of a warehouse. Will slows, his breath steaming the night air before him, holding his gun out before him, hating the way his red-stained hands are shaking. His bullet vest and trousers are still damp with blood, and his sweat soon makes him shiver.

Straining to hear past the thundering of his heart, Will opens his eyes as wide as possible, trying to see into the shadows, trying to catch a glint of Coby's knife or a flicker of movement. He keeps his back to the walls, ducking through a maze of packing crates, adrenaline sharpening his senses until he's sure he can hear the creak of his muscles tightening.

The air is thick with Coby's musky scent, and Will swallows hard. The other man is an Alpha. Heat sizzles through him, settling in a tingling swarm at the base of his skull. Will rolls his shoulders, fighting his body's response to the pheromones leaking from Coby's pores. He's safe; he's taking the heat suppressants. Nothing's going to happen. It can't.

A noise catches his attention. Will stills, peering around a forklift for a glimpse of Coby. Hears another sound, this time behind him, and turns to see Coby barely three feet away, brandishing his knife. Will raises his gun… Pauses… He's right there… *Shoot him… Take him down…*

But he can't do it. He can't shoot him. It's too… Impersonal. His shadow hisses at him. Better to stab. To *feel* the life seep through his fingers…

Coby sees his hesitation as weakness. His face splits into a grin and he leaps forward, barreling into Will's chest and knocking him back into the vehicle. A shot goes off but the bullet hits air. Pain explodes across Will's skull and he tastes blood. His legs go out from under him and he slides to the ground, his gun clattering away from numb, useless fingers.

Coby grabs him again, curling his fists around the straps of Will's bullet vest, and he hauls him upright. Blazing red eyes – rut-red – lock with his own fiery gold and Coby's mouth forms an 'oh' of surprise, before a slow smile curls his lips.

'My, my… *darlin'*…' the Alpha purrs, drawing out the word in a low, Southern drawl. Somehow, the sound of his voice makes Will tremble with fear and something else,

something far more disturbing. His insides twitch and his neck prickles. He shakes his head, but he can't clear the fog creeping in.

Coby drops him and Will sprawls at his feet. The Alpha crouches in front of him, reaching out to stroke a damp curl away from Will's bleeding forehead. Black seeps into the edges of Will's vision but he fights it, tears of pain pricking his eyes when he tries to shake his head clear. He wants to knock Coby's hand away – bile scratches his throat at the idea touching him – but he can't make his body respond.

'Easy,' Coby murmurs, his nostrils flaring to savor Will's scent. '*Easy*, darlin'. M'not gonna hurt ya.'

Will tries to speak. He wants to snarl at Coby, to tell him that *he's* the one who's going to hurt *him*, but his voice has been struck away. All that comes out is a strangled little whimper, which just seems to excite Coby even more. His eyes light up and a slow, hungry smile spreads across his pockmarked face as he shuffles even closer. Will manages to turn his face away, clenching his teeth as Coby sniffs hungrily along his jawline.

'You smell so *good*, little Omega,' Coby growls, hot hands clawing at Will's vest. '*So* good… I need ya, darlin'. Need an Omega of my own.'

Will feels the tide pull out in his head, slipping in and out of consciousness as Coby fumbles with his shirt buttons, but at the touch of calloused fingers on his nipples, rolling and pinching the sensitive nubs, he snaps his eyes wide open.

'N-!' His shout is cut off with Coby's bitter lips. He's pulled down, flipped so that he's on his front. Coby kneels behind him, clumsy hands trying to undo his belt.

'Gonna take ya… Gonna bond ya, darlin'. All mine… You'll be all mine.'

Will shakes his head again, using the pain to stay awake. No. No, this isn't happening. He can't… Not like this.

Cold air hits his lower back and he squirms forwards, groping for a pipe, a shard of glass, *anything* on the dirty, oil-stained floor in front of him. His tingling fingers close around an empty bottle and he swings it back blindly. Feels the impact and then hears it smash over Coby's head. The Alpha grunts, falling back as glittering shards rain down on him.

Will twists, coming again, jumping on him, his hands closing around Coby's throat. There's a moment where he thinks he'll do it, be able to strangle him, but then Coby's face darkens in anger and he shoves Will up and over his head and he's just so *strong*, and Will's world tilts as he's flipped onto his back.

He lands hard, knocking the breath from his lungs, and he wheezes out a gasp of pain as Coby pins him again, a knee in the gut doubling him over. There's a flash of steel and then the hunting knife is in his shoulder. Coby's sweaty palm muffles his scream as the Alpha gives the blade a vicious twist, severing the tendons and rendering Will's right arm useless.

‘You’re gonna regret hurtin’ me, darlin’,’ Coby snarls, leaning down into Will’s face, all trace of his gentle nature gone, replaced with ugly hate. Will’s heart skips a beat and then begins to trip double time, battering against his ribcage. He’s whining, unconscious little sounds to placate the Alpha, but Coby doesn’t seem to be responding. Will tilts his head back, baring his throat, letting his legs fall open. Everything in him is crying, begging for Coby not to hurt him. His shadow self is on the edges of his vision, watching with dark fury as Will’s body become soft, pliant… Everything a good Omega *should* be.

He can’t fight.

Coby lifts him and shoves him on his front again, driving the knife into his body even deeper. Will chokes on his own breath. He’s shaking now, bitter cold and numb everywhere except for his shoulder and the back of his neck. The stab wound is screaming agony. The nape of his neck is stinging with heat. How can part of him be *enjoying* this?

And then Coby’s strong hand is *on* his neck, thumb and fingers finding his pressure points, and heat explodes through him. *No! Not like this…*

Will cries out, sweat plastering his hair to his scalp, his body tingling with a thousand volts. *No…*

He’s slick. He can feel it dampening his thighs. His nose is full of the smell of Alpha musk; heavy, choking, thick in the rut. He’s still whining, clawing at the concrete floor, his nails broken and bleeding, but he’s pushing his hips back and Coby’s hands are all over him.

The Alpha is grunting with excitement, panting with it. He jerks Will’s trousers down, dipping his head to take in a lungful of Will’s smell even as he rasps his tongue through the slick.

Please… please, no… Don’t bite me… Don’t bond me…

It’s all he can think about. It races around his head, almost a prayer. Will can hear the way he’s gasping. He’s never felt so vulnerable, so *weak*… He’s making this strangled little sobbing sound, his lips trembling because all he wants is for Coby to *protect* him, like he’s supposed to.

‘Don’t… please… Samuel… don’t…’

‘Police! Stop!’

Footsteps come thundering through the factory. Flashlights zigzag in the darkness, slicing through the scene. Shouts ring out, a blur of confusion and horror.

‘What the…?’

‘Coby! Let him go!’

‘Someone get a neutralizer!’

‘Who’s…?’

‘Oh my god, is that *Will*?’

‘He’s an Omega!’

‘He’s *hurt*!’

Coby is wrenched off him with a strangled roar, three officers holding him down as a fourth plunges a needle of neutralizing hormone into his neck.

Will falls forwards, curling around himself, sick and shaking at how exposed he is. At how *helpless*.

One of the Alpha officers drops to his knees beside him, wrestling out of his jacket and draping it over Will’s shoulders, careful of the knife. He shields him from view and Will can’t stop the tears pouring down his face at the comforting presence. Can’t stop the fresh bout of whines that are pitched low to encourage an Alpha to protect him.

‘I’ve got you, it’s okay,’ the Alpha murmurs, trying to cup Will’s cheeks and lift his face up to look into his eyes. ‘Hey, Graham, right? Will Graham?’

Will lowers his eyes in submission. Nods. His teeth are chattering. His skin is crawling. He can feel more slick leaking out of him and it’s making him dizzy. When the Alpha opens his arms and invites him up for a hug, Will falls forwards against his chest, nuzzling under his chin and holding tight as though he’s drowning.

‘It’s okay; it’s gonna be okay,’ the Alpha murmurs, reaching up to check for a bite on the back of Will’s neck. Gasps when he finds its smooth. ‘Did he… rip your crest off? Where’s your Alpha, huh? Let’s call him.’

‘Don’t have an Alpha,’ Will mutters, shaking his head against the officer’s vest. ‘Not bonded.’

He feels the Alpha stiffen. Withdraw. He looks down at him with a new hunger in his blue eyes. Will’s jerking like a puppet on strings, trying to pull himself away. The hands are too tight; the Alpha is holding onto him. Pinning him… His face morphs. Coby leers at him again, crimson eyes blazing with a feral hunger.

‘Oh, *darlin’*…’

Will jerks awake, kicking out at the sheets binding his legs. He’s drenched with sweat but shaking with cold, his teeth chattering as he sits up.

One of the dogs gives a low whine, crawling closer and trying to lick at his bare legs, offering comfort. It’s not what he needs, but it’s all he has, and Will sits forwards, hunched over his knees as he cries into his hands.

It’s been a long time since he dreamed of Coby.

It feels like forever until the tears run out. He’s drained. Exhausted, but too scared too sleep. He can’t go through that again… He can’t.

Will gets up and creeps into the bathroom, locking the door behind him and sinking to the floor. He scrubs his hands through his greasy hair, cringing at how sticky his thighs feel. Without getting up, he gropes for a washcloth and wipes himself off before crawling to the bathmat and curling around himself. Grabs all the towels from the rail above his head and drapes them over him, being sure to cover his head. It's a poor excuse for a nest, but it's all he can manage right now.

Maybe it will be enough to make him feel safe.

***

The next morning, the shadows beneath Will's eyes are darker than usual. Price and Zeller join Beverly in commenting on how tired he looks, but Will ignores them, pinching the bridge of his nose in a vain attempt to shake off his throbbing headache. They are under the harsh lights of the autopsy suite, examining the mushroom infested bodies.

'What were they soaked in?' he asks, trying to concentrate through the pain.

'A highly concentrated mixture of hardwoods, shredded newspaper, and pig poop; perfect for growing mushrooms and other fungi.' Price almost sounds excited about this – at the very least, slightly awed. Will hazards a guess that, in addition to bird watching, Jimmy Price is also an avid amateur gardener.

'It was not the mushrooms, though,' Zeller says, not to be outdone by Price. 'They all died of kidney failure.'

'Dextrose in all the catheters,' Beverly says, glancing at Will as she speaks. 'He probably used some kind of dialysis or peristaltic to pump fluids after their circulatory systems broke down.'

His shadow stirs, and Will moves away from the door, further into the room. He's interested.

'Force-feeding them sugar water?'

'You know who loves sugar water?' Price asks excitedly. '*Mushrooms*. They crave it.'

'Recovering alcoholics,' Zeller suggests. 'They crave sugar. Uh, don't take that personally, buddy.' He gives Price a playful nudge.

'Oh, I'm not *recovering*,' Price says, grinning at the joke.

'Feed sugar to the fungus in your body, the fungus creates alcohol… So it's like friends helping friends, really,' Zeller says, nodding. Impressed.

Will chews his lip.

'It's not just alcoholics who have compromised endocrine systems,' he murmurs, thinking aloud. 'They all died of kidney failure?' Beverly and Zeller nod, and Will sighs. His headache lessens a fraction as the final piece of the puzzle clicks into place. *He knows*. 'Death by diabetic ketoacidosis.'

Beverly looks at her team.

‘Did you know they were diabetics?’

‘We don’t know they were diabetics,’ Zeller says, rifling through his reports for confirmation.

‘No, they’re all diabetics,’ Will insists. He’s feverish now; *he knows*. He knows. This is his design. ‘He induces a coma and puts them in the ground.’

‘How is he inducing diabetic comas?’ Beverly asks, looking straight into Will’s face. Will avoids her eyes, looking down and to the side.

‘Changes their medication,’ he mutters. Then, louder, ‘So he’s a doctor or a pharmacist, or he works somewhere in medical services.’

Beverly nods. Turns away, to stare down at the fungal victims.

‘He buries them, feeds them sugar to keep them alive long enough for the circulatory systems to soak it up.’

‘So he can feed the mushrooms!’ Price gasps.

Zeller looks along the row of corpses, his face twisted into a nauseous grimace.

‘We dug up his mushroom garden.’

Will’s shadow rumbles in his chest, growing and spreading tendrils out through his veins.

‘Yeah,’ he growls. ‘He’s gonna want to grow a new one.’

***

It doesn’t take them long to realize that The Farmer is Eldon Stammets, floating pharmacist and fungi-fanatic. Jack bursts into the pharmacy, flanked by armed FBI officers, but Eldon has fled. Will’s stomach twists again – he can feel someone’s fear, slipping away as they lose their grip on consciousness – and he grabs for Jack’s arm.

‘Is his car still in the parking lot?’

The victim is still alive, but barely. The manure reeks, and Will knows he’ll be scrubbing his cuticles for weeks just to get the smell out of his skin. Hannibal won’t want to be anywhere near him… Will pops a couple of aspirin. The headache seems to be coming from grinding his teeth, which he does whenever he has a stray thought about Dr Lecter. He needs to stop.

Price comes jogging up to them, flushed and shining with sweat at the exertion.

‘Jack. We just checked the browser history at Stammets’ work station.’ Something in his voice makes the fine hairs on Will’s neck stand to attention. He looks at Jack, who scowls at the forensic analyst.

‘Am I gonna wanna hear this?’ he asks.

‘No,’ Price warns. ‘And yes, but mostly no.’

They head back inside and find Zeller and Beverly hunched over a laptop at Stammets’ desk.

‘Freddie Lounds. TattleCrime.com.’ Zeller reads the blogger’s name and website title in disgust. Falls silent when Beverly begins to read the article aloud.

‘“The FBI isn’t just hunting psychopaths, they’re headhunting them too; offering competitive pay and benefits in the hopes of using one demented mind–”’ Her voice falters and she glances at Will before falling silent.

Jack scowls at her.

‘Keep going,’ he orders.

‘It’s about Will,’ Beverly says. Will feels a rush of gratitude towards her; even if she doesn’t know what he is, she wants to spare his feelings anyway. He bows his head as Jack draws himself up to his full height.

‘Go on.’

Beverly swallows and tries again.

‘“One demented mind to catch”… She goes into a lot of detail.’ She sounds apologetic. It’s odd, coming from an Alpha. Will’s stomach twists and he has a moment of mouth-watering panic as he thinks he’s going to be sick.

Beside him, Jack’s leather gloves creak as he balls his big hands into fists.

‘Son of a *bitch*.’

***

Sitting back in his leather desk chair, Hannibal scrolls through the latest article on TattleCrime.com, his calm expression betraying nothing of the anger raging inside him. He told Miss Lounds not to write about Will. He gave her fair warning, and yet here it is, a page of vulgarity about him, too close to the truth for comfort.

He is going to *eat* her for this. Saw open her skull and fry her brain in butter. Perhaps Will can join him; he would surely feel some satisfaction in watching her die. After all, she is responsible for telling the world about his dark secret. He might even enjoy the taste of her. Hannibal’s lips curl into a small smile.

He could feed Will her tongue. It would be poetic.

The photograph is shocking. Will’s inner shadow hardens his face. He looks intimidating, stood over the graves of The Farmer’s victims. His eyes are focused on the bodies, but to

Hannibal's sharp eyes there is still the glint of an Omega-gold rim in the photo. How long before Freddie discovers what he is? Something must be done about her.

'You are *naughty*, Miss Lounds.'

***

He's not sure why he's at the hospital again. It's not like Abigail is due to wake up anytime soon; she may never wake, in fact. But there's something about her room that makes Will feel… quiet.

But, when he arrives that evening, it's empty. Will pauses in the doorway. The air shimmers… He smells the forest… The current rises, tugging at him… Claws whisper through his hair…

He turns to the nurse's station, opening his mouth to speak just as his cell starts ringing. He holds up a hand in apology at the interruption.

'Sorry. Hello?'

Jack's voice comes through the speaker, tinny and crackling.

'It's Jack. Are you at the hospital?'

Unease flickers in his belly. Tendrils reach out, caressing his arms… Will frowns.

'Yes, I am.'

'Stammets knows about Abigail Hobbs.'

He's here.

The current grabs him. He's in the garden, shoveling earth. His mind opens, shadows twining and branching out.

Will hangs up and leans over the desk, right into the nurse's space, his heart racing with panic.

'Where is she? Abigail Hobbs, the girl in 408. Where is she?'

The nurse looks shocked. She sits back in her chair, words tumbling over each other in her hurry to answer him.

'They took her for tests.'

'Who took her?' *No, no, no!* Will's shadow consumes him. He has to find her. '*Who* took her?!'

'I don't know!'

Will throws her a look of disgust and takes off, sprinting down the corridor. Stammets needs to get Abigail from the hospital; he'll have a car in the underground parking lot. He'll be wheeling the bed towards the basement…

Wrenching open the door to the stairs, Will readies his gun as he races down the concrete stairs. He throws himself through the door on the ground floor, tearing down a service corridor, just in time to see Stammets wheeling Abigail's bed around a corner.

Kill him. Do it now.

Will doesn't even hesitate. Just pulls the trigger. The shot rings out, jarringly loud in the small space, and the bullet hits Stammets in the shoulder. Not fatal.

Stammets drops his gun and Will kicks it away as he reaches them. Holds his gun out, pointing the muzzle right into Stammets' face with one hand, reaching back to check Abigail's pulse. Alive. She's still alive.

'What were you gonna do to her?' he snarls, glaring down at the wounded man on the floor, his belly twisting at the sight of blood soaking through stolen scrubs.

'We all evolved from mycelium,' Stammets says. 'I'm simply reintroducing her to the concept.'

Will's chest tightens. Abigail's fragile body, pale skin bursting with mushrooms? No.

'By burying her alive?' he growls.

'The journalist said you understood me!' Stammets whines. Bile rises in Will's throat. He could do it; he could pull the trigger again, tear the life from his body…

'I don't,' he spits. Stammets nods, an ugly look crossing his pudgy face, watery blue eyes fixed on Will's gold-bright ones.

'You would have. You're special.' Stammets looks dreamy. 'If you walk through a field of mycelium, they know you are there. They *know* you are there. The spores reach for you as you walk by.'

Will's shadow reaches out, his tendrils caressing Stammets' own darkness. He can *see* it. The structure. The connection…

His darkness *is* reaching for someone.

'I know who you're reaching for,' Stammets whispers. 'I *know*… Abigail Hobbs. And you should have let me plant her. You would have found her in a field, where she was finally able to reach back!'

Will stares down at him. There are running footsteps now. The police are coming. It's too late.

It's over.

I'm not reaching for Abigail, Will thinks, watching as Stammets is cuffed and led away. *I'm reaching for Hannibal.*

***

He doesn't go home afterwards. He can't. He can't stay at the hospital; the room is tainted. Can't go to the office – Jack would be insufferable right now.

There's only one place he *can* go.

Will keeps his back to Dr Lecter, staring at the crimson-slashed curtains of his office.

'When you shot Eldon Stammets,' Hannibal says, unperturbed to be speaking to Will's back, even if it is hidden from view by a hideous blue plaid shirt. 'Who was it that you saw?'

'I didn't see Hobbs,' Will says quietly. There's a void inside him; a deafening silence that he doesn't understand. He feels… *empty*.

'Then it's not Hobbs' ghost that's haunting you, is it?' Hannibal says. 'It's the inevitability of there being a man *so* bad that killing him felt *good*.'

He makes it sound so simple. Will's shadow purrs its agreement, slithering between his ribs.

Yess…

Will shakes his head, a single jerk.

'Killing Hobbs felt *just*.'

'Which is why you're here; to prove that sprig of zest you feel is from saving Abigail, *not* from killing her father,' Hannibal says, summing it up and seeing through the bullshit so clearly that all Will can think is *fuck you*.

'I didn't feel a *sprig of zest* when I shot Eldon Stammets,' he snaps. Why doesn't he feel angry at Hannibal? Why doesn't he feel *anything*?

'You didn't kill Eldon Stammets,' Hannibal reasons.

'I thought about it,' Will admits. He grimaces. He should feel sick. Dirty. Why doesn't he? Why does it feel so warm in here? As though he's in a warm bath…

He ducks his head, exposing the nape of his neck.

'I'm still not entirely sure that wasn't my intention when pulling the trigger,' he confesses.

Hannibal controls his breathing so as not to startle him. Will is perfectly still; perfectly calm. He has his head dipped forwards, baring the vulnerable skin between shirt collar and his hairline, an exquisitely erotic view that makes Hannibal's eyes prickle with the urge to turn red.

That's it, Will. Open up. Let me see you.

Hannibal stands, moving a fraction closer so that the air shifts with his scent, carrying it closer to the trembling Omega. He wants Will to associate his smell with a feeling of safety.

'If your intention was to kill him, it's because you understand *why* he did the things he did,' he says. 'It's beautiful in its own way; giving voice to the unmentionable.'

Will's shadow quivers. *You know me…*

He turns. Glances at Hannibal and manages a wobbly half-smile. This is so fucked up. *He* is so fucked up. He shouldn't be so relaxed in this man's presence. He barely knows him.

'I should've stuck to fixing boat motors in Louisiana,' he says, sinking into the deep leather chair behind him.

'A boat engine is a machine, a predictable problem, easy to solve,' Hannibal says. He loosens the bottom button on his suit jacket and takes the seat opposite Will, both of them sitting forwards, reaching for each other. 'You fail, there's a paddle. Where was your paddle with Hobbs?'

'You're supposed to be my paddle.' Will's voice is wobbling, barely more than a whisper, his eyes bright with fear, brows furrowed in doubt. He searches Hannibal's face.

Please… Please don't leave me alone with this.

'I am,' Hannibal promises. 'It wasn't the act of killing Hobbs that got you down, was it? Didn't you really feel so bad because killing him felt so good?'

The tension hangs between them, thick with everything unspoken. Will's shadow reaches out, searching for Hannibal's darkness, moving his own arms before he can stop it. He twists his hands together, catching himself before he grabs the other man's hands, and takes a shaking breath before speaking the ugly truth.

'I… *liked* killing Hobbs…'

Pride blossoms in Hannibal's chest. His dark dragon rumbles its approval and he allows himself to reach for the younger man. Locks eyes with Will as the Omega stares at him in shock when Hannibal laces their fingers together; a bridge across the empty space between them.

'Killing must feel good to God, too,' he says softly. Will's hand is calloused but soft, and *so* hot… 'He does it all the time. Are we not created in His image?'

Will's body is charged; electric. Hannibal's hand is warm and soft, the grip firm and confident. *I've got you*, it says. It soothes him, calms him… He's *safe* here.

He snorts a half-laugh.

'That depends who you ask,' he replies.

‘God is terrific,’ Hannibal says, staring deep into Will’s eyes, allowing a hint of red to warm the color around his pupils. ‘He dropped a church roof on thirty-four of his worshippers last Wednesday night in Texas, while they sang a hymn.’

Will shivers. Molten heat is pooling between his legs, an uncontrollable ache. He can barely remember to breathe, but the dizziness isn’t from lack of oxygen. He needs… this… He needs… *more*…

He shifts forwards until he’s perched on the very edge of the seat. Forgets to be uncomfortable in Hannibal’s presence; forgets that he feels small, dirty and too ordinary for someone like Hannibal. He just needs to be closer to him.

‘And did God feel good about that?’ he whispers thickly. Hannibal’s burgundy eyes have stolen his voice; he’s falling into them, drowning in his darkness, weightless as heat sears him.

Hannibal allows a tremor to run through him. Will’s scent is strong; it flows from him, heady and powerful. Hannibal feels drunk with it. He wants to stand up, drag Will from the chair, walk him back towards the ladder or the desk and claim his mouth with his own, dip his tongue inside the other man’s mouth until he has tasted every part of it, *owned* every part of it, and then dip lower, tearing away the ugly clothes to reveal the porcelain perfect body beneath.

‘He felt powerful,’ he breathes.

The promise hangs between them, the same golden thread as before. Barely a whisper. Something so young and tender that it has yet to form.

Potential.

Will holds his breath, desperate to ask if he is imagining this, or if there really is something more between them. He's not felt like this in a long time... and never for another man...

'Hannibal...' His voice catches and Will bites his tongue. Shakes his head, giving up, and looks down. He jumps when Hannibal stands, drawing him up with him.

Hannibal pulls Will closer, step by step, until their bodies are pressed together. A simple hug, but for the Omega, a lifeline.

He’s shaking now. A sheen of sweat glistens on his forehead. Will can hear the soft rumbles escaping his throat, but he can’t stop them. He’s *purring*.

Hannibal smiles to himself. To hear an Omega purr, such a subconscious sound, sparks a fire in him. He cups the back of Will’s head, rubbing his thumb across his neck to feel the vibrations. Dips his head and presses a feather-light kiss to Will’s hairline as he wraps his arms tighter around him.

Will melts against Hannibal’s chest, his arms coming up to hug tight around Hannibal’s waist. He sighs, closing his eyes at how *good* this feels. Tingles chase each other around his body.

The insides of his thighs are damp but, for once, he doesn't care. The nape of his neck is iron-hot, flushed and *itching* to be bitten. But Hannibal doesn't push his advantage; just rests his cheek on top of Will's head, giving him simple comfort, and Will quivers at the *restraint* of the Alpha, a the *respect* he has for him as Hannibal strokes a finger up and down his spine. He closes his eyes, savoring the feel of hard muscles and soft fabric against his face, breathing Hannibal's scent in deep.

I trust you.

Hannibal closes his eyes, relishing the power he has over Will. As much as the baser part of himself wants to shove the Omega down and bite him, tear the flushed nape of his neck into a swollen crest of ownership, waiting is its own form of exquisite pleasure.

Soon, he promises, allowing his intention to flow through his fingers and into Will's trembling body. *I will break you and then, when you are ready… I will save you.*

Potage

Chapter Summary

Abigail wakes up. Will and Hannibal escort her home, causing emotions to run wild as they face hostility, including another murder. Hannibal raises his concerns about using heat suppressants, and Will confesses a secret.

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone! I'm SO sorry this took so long to write!!! I can't wait for more scenes where I can deviate a bit from the plot and add gooey, fluffy love and stuff more. Checking against the episodes as I go is VERY time consuming.

I hope you enjoy. Thank you ever so much for all the amazing comments as well. You're fantastic. xxx

After four nights without nightmares, Will feels unusually good, and he takes a greedy breath of frosty morning air as he opens the front door to let the dogs out. It's a fresh, clear day. Birds chirrup and the sun kisses his cheeks. The dogs race down the porch steps, all skittering claws and wagging tails.

Will smiles. His body has finally recovered from the last couple of assignments. He feels calm; the bruises from so much pain and violence have faded to scars in his psyche.

He's wrenched back to reality a second later, though, when he steps onto the front lawn, and realises that the dogs are gathered around Alana Bloom. She greets them all and then straightens, smiling an apology at the way his shoulders go up and his guard comes down at the intrusion.

'Morning,' she says, her blue eyes twinkling as she takes in Will's thin t-shirt, loose boxers and ratty old slippers. Only an Omega could make such a mismatch of clothing look good.

As they walk towards each other, Alana can feel the resentment coming off Will at being seen before he can spray himself in Beta pheromones. He has no idea how nice he looks and smells first thing in the morning; all tousled hair and sweet Omega scent. Even to a Beta, he is appealing.

'Didn't hear you drive up,' Will grumbles. Was he really so out of it this morning that he didn't notice an *engine* outside?

‘Hybrid,’ Alana explains. ‘Great car for stalking.’ She wishes she didn’t have semi-bad news for him. He’s adorably grumpy, but that will soon sour into a real bad mood when she tells him why she’s here.

Will nods and then shifts, painfully aware that his boxers leave nothing to the imagination.

‘Um, I’m compelled to go cover myself,’ he mutters.

Alana shrugs. She wouldn’t mind him staying *exactly* as he is.

‘I have brothers,’ she says. Will frowns, turning to head back into the house.

‘Well, I’ll put a robe on just the same. Do you want a cup of coffee and, more immediately, er, why are you here?’

‘Yes, and Abigail Hobbs woke up,’ Alana says.

It’s like a kick in the gut, and Will stops dead, turning to look back over his shoulder at her, his eyes flashing gold in the sun.

‘Huh… Well, you sure know how to bury the lead,’ he mutters.

‘Want *me* to get you a cup of coffee?’ Alana asks.

‘*No*, I wanna get my coat,’ Will replies. He doesn’t like the way Alana is holding back; like there’s more. He just wants to get to the hospital and make sure Abigail is alright, especially if Jack wants to interrogate her.

Alana fixes him with a stern but gentle look.

‘Let’s have a cup of coffee,’ she insists, striding forwards to steer him into the house. Will take a breath, ready to argue, but Alana’s jaw is set and he knows he won’t win. Sometimes, he wishes he could be more dominant. Stronger. But he isn’t, so Alana just shepherds him inside and fixes them both a strong black coffee, heaping two large sugars into Will’s and placing it in front of him on the table.

They don’t talk at first, but Alana seems to expect this. She’s giving Will time to gather his thoughts. She just sits there, fighting a shiver at the draft leaking through the ramshackle old house, warming her hands around her mug. How can Will stand such a cold place? She’d always read that Omegas liked warm places and soft, comfortable furnishings, but it was as though Will deliberately sought out the very opposite of what his body craved.

The landline rings, shattering the silence. Caller ID pops up: Jack Crawford. Will drinks his coffee and ignores it until it stops.

A moment later, his cellphone starts to buzz across the table. Will frowns at Alana.

‘Is he gonna keep calling?’ he asks. Alana lifts one shoulder in a tiny shrug.

‘Jack wants you to go see her,’ she says. Will glances into her blue eyes and then drops his gaze.

‘And you don’t,’ he replies, his heart squeezing out an extra thump. He *needs* to see Abigail. *Please don’t stop me.*

‘Eventually,’ Alana says. Will scoffs at her.

‘*Jack* thinks Abigail was an accomplice to her father’s crimes.’

Alana sits back in her chair, considering him – and her next words – carefully.

‘I don’t want to get in the middle of you and Jack, but if I can be helpful as a buffer –’

‘Oh, I like you as a buffer,’ Will confirms, offering her a quick, dark smile. ‘I also like the fact that you *rattle* Jack. He respects you *far* too much to yell at you…’ He huffs a laugh. ‘No matter *how much* he wants to.’

‘And I take advantage of that,’ Alana agrees, smiling back at him. It’s always been them against the world, ever since…

She stops herself before Will senses anything from her, but it may be too late. A sadness has come across his face; he doesn’t look at her again, but lowers his eyes to the table.

‘Abigail Hobbs doesn’t have *anyone*,’ he says, his voice shredded with guilt. The sound of it cuts at Alana, but she swallows down any thoughts of pity and says what Will *needs* to hear.

‘You can’t be her everyone.’

Will doesn’t respond; he just sits there, looking sad and lonely and lost. Alana rolls her eyes at her own thought.

‘When I said what I was going to say in my head it sounded really insulting, so I’m going to find another way to say it –’ she begins, but Will uncoils like a snake, cutting her off with how precise it is. She glances into his eyes and they are dark; the gold dances around his wide pupils. For just a moment, he looks… dangerous.

‘Say it the insulting way,’ Will growls. Alana takes a breath. He’s right, and he appreciates honesty above all else.

‘Dogs keep a promise a person can’t,’ she says softly.

It’s a low blow and she can see it cuts right to Will’s heart. She’s referring to the string of failed relationships over the years; Will’s dogs see the darkness inside him but love him anyway. They accept him for who he is. *What* he is. Unconditionally. They don’t demand that he bond with them; give up his life, his passion… Don’t ask that he change.

Will swallows. He considers his answer and speaks deliberately. He *needs* Alana to understand him in this.

‘I’m not collecting another stray.’ She’s more than that to him. To Hannibal, too, he thinks. They have a bond. A connection.

Alana sighs.

‘The first person Abigail talks to about what happened can’t be anyone who was *there* when it happened. So that means no Dr Lecter, either.’

‘Yeah, much less the guy who killed dad,’ Will says bitterly, his eyes fixed on the table. Then, almost because he *has* to, he adds, ‘Jack’s wrong about Abigail.’

Alana tilts her head, considering him. He’s not ready; she can see how raw he still is, after taking a life. He may think he’s healed, but he’s far from recovered.

‘Let me reach out to her in my own way,’ she suggests. Will glances at her and Alana sees the darkness in his eyes… Watches it fade as he agrees to wait.

She won’t lose him to it.

***

Will paces back and forth in front of his desk, his voice ringing out through the silent room as he clicks through the slides accompanying his lecture.

‘Garrett Jacob Hobbs, the Minnesota Shrike, abducted and murdered *eight* girls over an eight-month period. Each of them had the same hair color, same eye color, same age, same height, same weight, as his daughter, Abigail.’

The victims flash through, one after another. Will can feel the pity seeping from the Beta students; the tingle of anger from the two Alphas in the room.

‘There was a ninth victim,’ he continues, coming to a stop at one side of the room. ‘Who also fit Abigail Hobbs’s profile, but Garrett Jacob Hobbs *didn’t* murder her.’ He clicks again and the stag’s head with its impaled body, comes up on the screen. ‘The killer who *did, wanted* us to know he *wasn’t* the Minnesota Shrike.’ He moves to stand directly in front of his desk, planting his feet squarely in defiance of Jack Crawford’s scent invading his classroom. Glances past his bulky shoulder and feels his stomach drop out when he spots Hannibal following close behind. He hasn’t seen him since…

Will swallows. Feels the ghost of Hannibal’s fingers stroke up and down his spine. He can imagine Hannibal’s low voice, lips brushing his ear as the taller man dips his head to murmur for him to continue.

When he speaks again, he’s not surprised that his voice isn’t steady; the quiver comes from being watched by two such strong Alphas, one of which is *Hannibal*, and because the stag’s head display makes him feel… uneasy.

‘He was *better* than that,’ he says. ‘He is an *intelligent* psychopath. He is a sadist. He will never kill like this again. So, how do we catch him?’

Hannibal leans closer to Jack and drops his voice to a murmur so as not to disturb Will's flow.

'Giving a lecture on Hobbs's copycat?'

'Well, we need every good mind we can get on this,' Jack says, by way of apology. Hannibal schools his face to calm, hiding the anger at how brash Jack is being with the Omega in his care. Even from here, Hannibal can detect the pain souring Will's scent. It's covered well; it's doubtful anyone else can even detect a second scent beneath the artificial one, but Hannibal has been cultivating his senses so that he can quickly separate and discard Will's attempts to hide. The result is a feeling of dark satisfaction; knowing that he, and he alone, can see behind the mask that Will wears with the rest of the world.

I will know you better than anyone, Will, Hannibal thinks to himself, watching as the Omega paces back and forth, trying to fight the tension in his body with movement. *Better than you know yourself.*

'This copycat is an avid reader of Freddie Lounds and TattleCrime.com,' Will continues. His eyes skate over Jack and Hannibal, never settling on anyone or anything. Hiding behind his glasses. Another mask. 'He had intimate knowledge of Garrett Jacob Hobbs's murders, motives, patterns… Enough to recreate them and, arguably, elevate them to *art*.'

Hannibal's eyes gleam in the darkness. *My, my, Will. You do understand*.

'How intimately did he know Garrett Jacob Hobbs?' Will asks, casting the question out like a fishing line as he changes the image behind him to the hunting photo of Abigail and her father. 'Did he appreciate him from afar, or did he engage him? Did he ingratiate himself into Hobbs's life? Did Hobbs know his copycat as he was known?'

Watching Will, Hannibal can't keep the corner of his mouth from curling into a faint smile as he swallows the purr rumbling in his chest. *So clever*.

Will clicks onto the final image – Mrs Hobbs, her throat slashed, painted in blood.

'Before Garrett Jacob Hobbs murdered his wife and attempted to do the same to his daughter, he received an untraceable call.'

Hannibal feels a jolt down his spine. He is rapt, his eyes prickling red as he absorbs every word Will speaks.

Will perches on the edge of his desk as exhaustion overwhelms him. He feels like he's run a marathon. The restful few days were for nothing; he's as tired as ever.

'I believe, the as-yet-unidentified caller was our copycat killer,' he says heavily, thus ending the lesson.

Hannibal allows a single purr to rumble deep in his throat.

That's my boy.

***

The walls of the Port Haven Psychiatric Facility are painted in calming blues and creams. There are several Omega nurses around – caring being one of the few professions where they are encouraged to participate – and Will closes a trembling hand around the can of Beta spray in his pocket. *Please… please don't let them realise…*

Hannibal flares his nostrils, picking up a faint sour note of concern from Will. Without breaking his stride, he reaches down and laces their fingers together, giving them a gentle squeeze. Will pauses, glancing at him in surprise, and then the corner of his mouth twists into a tiny smile before he returns the pressure.

They walk, hand in hand, until they reach the corridor where Abigail's room is, and then Hannibal releases him. Will pushes open the door and step inside ahead of him, briefly wondering if Hannibal finds it as difficult as he does; typically, an Alpha would enter first – to scope the location for danger before exposing an Omega to it. But Hannibal clearly trusts Will to look after himself… He feels a flicker of warmth in his belly, and a smile tugs at his lips.

The momentary happiness disappears, though, and he clenches his jaw when he realises that there is a sharp perfume overlaying a rich, Alpha scent in the room already. They can hear a low voice, deceptively soothing given the snake it belongs to.

'… A man named Will Graham. Works for the FBI, but *isn't* FBI. He catches insane men because he can think like them.' Freddie Lounds hears Will behind her and looks over her shoulder. She has a resigned look; she knows she'll be told to leave, but when she speaks, her voice is steady. 'Because he *is* insane,' she finishes, stabbing at Will with her words.

Will holds himself tall; he can *feel* the emotions buzzing within the fiery-hared journalist; anger tainted with fear, frustration… an overwhelmingly cloying sense of *smugness*. She got here first; she got to speak to Abigail first. She's planted that seed of doubt in her mind…

Even though he applied the gold-dulling eyedrops in the car on the way over here, Will can't bring himself to meet Freddie's steely-blue eyes; he fixes his hard stare on the air near her shoulder.

'Would you excuse us, please?' he asks coldly. Then, approaching the end of the bed, he offers Abigail a tight-jawed smile that is both a greeting and an apology. His skin hurts from Freddie's intense dislike of him. 'I'm Special Agent Will Graham.'

Hannibal remains in the doorway, his coat folded neatly over one arm, considering the female Alpha with detached interest. An Omega nurse hovers in the doorway, naturally trying to soothe the tension in the room with her calming presence.

Freddie sizes Will up, holding her ground by the bedside and turning fully to face him. However, when she speaks, she tosses the words back to Abigail, pitting herself in the middle of them.

‘By Special Agent, he means *not* really an Agent,’ she says. ‘He didn’t get past the screening process.’ And then she looks right into Will’s face, tilts her head ever so slightly as though considering him, and adds, ‘Too unstable.’

Will is trembling now. His dark shadow growls at him to attack Freddie, to slam her up against the wall and hold her by her throat, squeeze until the life dims from her eyes, leeching the fake care from her face. Hannibal, sensitive to changes in Will’s scent, tastes the sharp, rich tang he has come to associate with Will’s dark rage, and steps up to intervene.

‘I really must insist you leave the room,’ he says, gazing down into Freddie’s face, dominating the space with his presence. Freddie, accepting Hannibal’s greater dominance, subconsciously tilts her head to show a hint of creamy white neck as a show of submission, and reaches one black-gloved hand into her handbag, withdrawing a business card.

‘If you want to talk –’ she begins, one last attempt to subvert Abigail. Will strikes, fast as a cobra, and snatches the card from Freddie’s fingers before she can place it on Abigail’s bed. He shoves it the breast pocket of his jacket and swallows the dry lump in his throat, waiting until Freddie has left the room to remove his glasses. He doesn’t want to hide from Abigail; she deserves to find out what he really is. If she reports him… so be it. It’s the least he can do, after everything he’s taken from her.

‘Abigail…’ Will takes a deep, shaky breath and gestures to Hannibal. ‘This is Dr Lecter.’

At the introduction, Hannibal takes another step closer, placing himself between Will and the girl. Her scent is choked by harsh chemicals – antiseptic and cleaning spray – making it difficult for even his sensitive nose to detect. He parts his lips to catch her pheromones on the roof of his mouth and notes the lack of anger. She is frightened, certainly, but also… curious.

‘Do you remember us?’ Will asks, hesitant. Wary of rejection. *So much obligation*, Hannibal muses.

‘I remember you,’ Abigail says, her brow creasing into a little frown. She waits for a long moment, as though considering what to say, and then her lips tighten. ‘You killed my dad.’

Her sadness hits Will in the chest and he can feel his eyes sting as the gold pushes past the dulling liquid, burning through the blue. He blinks tears away, his jaw working furiously. He stares down, his shoulders heavy and pain sliding across his forehead. *She’s right. She’s right. I’m a killer.*

‘You’ve been in bed for days, Abigail,’ Hannibal says lightly, refusing to look at Will, to acknowledge the way his fingers are twitching into fists. ‘Why don’t we have a walk?’

***

Abigail dresses in dark jeans and emerald green coat, winding a scarf around her stitched throat to hide the bandage. Hannibal and Will wait outside until she’s ready; they don’t touch again, but Hannibal stands close enough that Will can feel his warmth and brush their shoulders together when he rests his weight on one foot. Will keeps his head bowed,

unconsciously displaying the side of his neck to Hannibal, hands twitching in and out of fists at his sides.

When Abigail appears, shaky and hesitant in the doorway, he offers her his arm. His stomach clenches when she accepts; he'd braced himself for rejection, but this wary acceptance is almost worse. Abigail leans on him as they make their way, torturously slowly, down to the greenhouse garden at the back of the hospital. Port Haven is a converted mansion, and the greenhouse is a tribute to Victorian gothic elegance; a curving iron framework and panes of delicate glass laced with moss.

Will takes a deep breath as they enter the garden room, trying to find comfort in the rich smell of dirt and the soft perfume of late-blooming flowers. He can't; Abigail is hurting too much, which means *he* is hurting too much – their necks throb, they're drained and Abigail's chest is a gaping black hole of grief.

'I'm sorry we couldn't save your mother,' Will mutters. The silence is choking him. 'We did everything we could, but she was already gone.'

He spots a stone bench and guides Abigail over to it. Exhaustion has leeched the colour from her face, and she wobbles as Will guides her to sit down. Hannibal comes up to stand on the other side, ever-watchful. He doesn't offer to help; this is something Will needs to do, and besides, he is curious to see how Abigail will keep up her pretence now that she is tired.

'I know,' Abigail says, folding her hands in her lap. 'I saw him kill her.' Her mouth twists in unhappiness. 'He was loving right up until the second he wasn't. Kept telling me he was sorry; to just hold still.' She glances up, her blue eyes bright with pain, pushing it into Will's until she can see the gold burn bright. 'He was gonna make it all go away.'

Hannibal glances at Will; he can smell the sour note of self-hate spoiling his scent. Guilt and anger are such a delightful mix on Will – dark chocolate and blood – but when that rage turns inwards, Hannibal wants to kiss him until he sweetens again. His boy needs training; he needs to accept his darkness as the inspiration that it is.

'There was plenty wrong with your father, Abigail, but there's nothing wrong with you.' Will's voice trembles; he tries to swallow but his throat isn't working properly. Abigail's gaze is piercing him, locking him in place. His back screams agony from the tension running down his spine. 'You say he was loving; I believe it. That's what you brought out in him.'

He *needs* her to understand this; needs her to understand that he believes in her. That he's there for her, even after taking everything away from her.

A shadow crosses Abigail's face but she doesn't look away.

'It's not all I brought out in him.'

Hannibal considers her. She's good; manipulating Will's empathy and turning it into sympathy. Clouding his judgement so completely that he would do anything for her. Anything to help with her pain. She furrows her brow and allows fear to sharpen her scent, flooding Will with her emotions.

‘I’m gonna be messed up,’ she says, chewing on her lower lip. ‘Aren’t I?’ She glances up at Will. ‘I’m worried about nightmares.’

Clever girl, Hannibal thinks, flicking his own dark eyes towards Will’s trembling form. Nightmares are common among Omegas exposed to violence. It will strike a chord in Will whilst simultaneously adding to his sense of guilt.

Not trusting his knees not to buckle, Will sinks onto the bench beside Abigail. He keeps a distance between them, but the Beta doesn’t flinch away; for all her grief, she trusts him not to hurt her.

Hannibal closes the gap, positioning himself closer to Will.

‘We’ll help you with the nightmares,’ he says.

Will bows his head; he feels flayed. This is harder than he thought it would be. He’s glad Hannibal is here with him; standing over them; guarding them, keeping them both safe.

‘There's no such thing as getting used to what you experienced,’ he says, glancing sideways at Abigail. ‘It bothers me a lot. I worry about nightmares, too.’

Abigail looks at him, her breath catching as she chews at her lip.

‘So… killing somebody, even if you have to do it… It feels that bad?’

Hannibal considers Will carefully – after his confession the other day, about *enjoying* killing Hobbs, how will he answer?

Will ducks his head, his face twisted with pain. He screws his hands together, picking at his thumbnail to hide the shaking.

‘It’s the ugliest thing in the world,’ he whispers.

A moment passes, and then Abigail looks up at Hannibal for permission.

‘I wanna go home.’

***

Stepping out into the chilly air on the hospital steps, Will shakes himself free of the last vestiges of Abigail’s pain, scrubbing a hand through his hair to clean it of antiseptic smell. His head is throbbing and his stomach is bubbling with acid, but he ignores it in favour of popping another heat suppressant.

Determined to associate his touch and smell with comfort, and wean Will off his heat suppressants, Hannibal reaches down and gives the Omega’s hand another brief, gentle squeeze. Will returns the pressure, offering a crooked, bitter smile, and then lets go to walk beside him towards Hannibal’s Bentley.

Before they're in sight of it, however, Will's shoulders tense back up as a jolt of anger zaps up his vertebrae. Freddie Lounds straightens up from the bonnet of her car, her eyes snapping blue fire even as she paints on a gentle expression.

'Special Agent Graham.' Freddie holds out a hand to shake, but Will ignores her in favour of ducking his head to slide his glasses back on. *Please*, he thinks, grinding his teeth at the caustic aftertaste in the Alpha's scent. *Please let the lenses hide the gold…*

'Are you trying to salvage this joke from the mouth of madness?' he growls. Freddie adopts an air of apology.

'Please,' she says. 'Let me apologise for my behaviour in there. It was sloppy and… *misguided*, and hurtful.'

At the growl building in Will's throat – barely loud enough for Hannibal to hear – he decides to step in; an attempt to distract the journalist and give his Omega a breather.

'Miss Lounds; now is not the time,' he warns.

Freddie considers him, and then dismisses him in favour of addressing Will again.

'Look, you and I may have our own reasons for being here, but I also think we both genuinely care about what happens to Abigail Hobbs,' she says.

'You told her I was *insane*,' Will snarls. Freddie accepts this.

'I can undo that.'

Will huffs a scornful laugh.

'You help Abigail see me as more than her father's killer, and I help you with online ad sales?' Will's tone is acid, and Freddie barely holds back a flinch.

'I can undo what I said,' she replies. Her tone sharpens. 'I can also make it a lot worse.'

Hannibal can smell the change in Will's scent as his shadow-self uncoils, propelling Will forwards to loom over Freddie. The air around him crackles with tension, and he bares his teeth in a snarl, squaring his shoulders as he draws himself up to his full height.

'Miss Lounds; it's not very smart to piss off a guy who thinks about *killing* people for a *living*.'

That's my boy, Hannibal thinks, the corners of his mouth twitching into a small, self-satisfied smile as his own darkness croons to Will's monster.

Freddie tilts her head, narrowing her eyes before visibly backing down. She holds a hand up in surrender and turns away, hiding her dark smirk. Will Graham is going to *regret* saying that.

The fire burns out of Will in an instant, leaving him swaying and shaky. He glances up at Hannibal, his lips twisting into an unhappy grimace.

‘I lost my temper,’ he mutters, scrubbing at the back of his head. His belly is aching and there’s a sharp headache building behind his eyes. He has a sudden, irrational urge to ask Hannibal for a quick shoulder rub, or a squeeze on the nape of his neck, but that’s a ridiculous thought – that’s only something an Alpha would do for their bonded Omega. Touching such a private and sensitive part of Will’s body otherwise would be… *inappropriate*.

‘Perfectly understandable,’ Hannibal says, pardoning the outburst. He unlocks his car and catches himself before he tries to open the door for Will. He is is far from useless, even when diminished with regret. ‘Few people respond well to threats, no matter how feeble.’

Will huffs a bitter laugh and searches his pockets for the bottle of suppressants. A headache means he’s due another dose. He can’t even remember when he was on a regular schedule with them.

‘I doubt any of Freddie Lounds’s threats are *feeble*,’ he says, dry-swallowing a couple of tablets. He pulls his glasses off and grinds the heels of his palms into his aching eyes. ‘Jack’s going to be furious.’

Hannibal hums a non-committal sound and starts the engine. *I look forward to it*, he thinks.

They drive in silence for a while, Will staring forlornly out of the window, his eyes stormy-blue from the overcast sky. Hannibal gives him his silence, using the time to continue his analysis of the Omega in his presence, and to conceive a plan to mould and condition Will’s mind to accept his darkness as the true gift that it is.

It’s all there; Hannibal can see the black fire inside him whenever Will stands up to Jack Crawford or Freddie Lounds. He has the instincts of a killer, which is why he can so easily take on their personas. What Hannibal now wants to explore is Will’s *own* personality. To help him make his own kill. Garrett Jacob Hobbs was a good start, but defence of a life is a shield that Will desperately clings to, as though it can dam the dark waters within him.

There are several pieces that Hannibal needs in place beforehand; he can guide and manipulate to a point, but he needs to turn Will’s Omega biology against him if he is truly going to set him free.

‘How long have you been taking the heat suppressants?’ he asks, breaking the quiet.

The sound of Hannibal’s voice makes Will jump. Dragged from thinking over his conversation with Abigail and his attack on Freddie, again and again as if he can erase the more damaging memories by sheer repetition, it takes him a second to understand the question. When he does, his heart skips a beat and his palms tingle with sweat. He squints a frown down at the hands nervously twisting in his lap.

‘Um… Why?’

‘As your doctor, it is imperative that I have full knowledge of your medical history,’ Hannibal says, the lie flowing from his tongue.

Will frowns at him, as though doubting the answer. Hannibal doesn’t look at him – he knows Will wants him to, so he can check for the truth in his eyes, and he will not give him that. Will has to *earn* his attention.

When Hannibal refuses to give in, and the pause drags into an uncomfortable silence, Will clears his throat and hangs his head. Hannibal’s right; as his doctor, he *does* need to know. What difference does it make, anyway? He curls his hand into a fist and taps it on his thigh, trying for a regular pattern but faltering every few knocks.

‘Almost five years,’ he admits quietly. He flinches when Hannibal turns his head towards him – on anyone else it would a dismayed gasp, followed by a desperate plea for him to come off the tablets and let his body experience a natural heat cycle.

Hannibal, however, merely looks, narrows his eyes in displeasure and then returns his attention to the streets of Baltimore.

‘It is not advisable to take heat suppressants continually beyond three years,’ he says. ‘Prolonged use increases your risk of neurological symptoms and organ damage.’

‘I know,’ Will snaps. He can’t help it. Guilt is making him flush and squirm. He wants to get out and walk the rest of the way back to the office. To be anywhere but trapped in this steel box with Dr Lecter’s disapproval.

Hannibal allows another silence until they reach the FBI parking lot. Then, before he cuts the engine, he reaches over and places a soothing but firm hand on Will’s knee.

‘There are other Iris Inhibitor drops available,’ he says, looking directly into Will’s gold-ringed eyes. ‘Perhaps we can find some that do not cause your vision to blur.’

Will’s forehead creases into a tiny frown.

‘How…?’

‘Your glasses,’ Hannibal says, rewarding Will’s eye contact with a small smile. ‘You wear them more frequently when using the eye drops, and I noticed that they cause your sclera to become bloodshot. An adverse reaction, I’m afraid.’

‘Just one more thing my body doesn’t like,’ Will mutters. He glances down at the Alpha’s hand, still resting, hot and heavy, on his leg. ‘Dr Lecter…?’

‘Yes, Will?’

‘I… don’t want to go into heat this year,’ Will says, lifting his chin defiantly, ready to argue Hannibal down if the Alpha tries to insist. His belly swoops and a cold lump forms in his chest when the other man merely nods and pulls away, leaving him exposed and trembling. When he’s tired, like that night in the hospital, he has moments of weakness, but now… He can’t. He *can’t*.

‘I understand,’ Hannibal murmurs. He watches as Will gives a shaky nod, taking his comment as acceptance, and fumbles to get out of the car.

Cutting the engine, Hannibal allows himself a brief look in the rear-view mirror, checking that there is no tell-tale red in his own eyes. Satisfied that they will not betray his emotions, he climbs out and follows Will into the building.

You may not want it, he thinks to himself, drinking in every detail of the smaller man’s hunched shoulders and stiff legs. Always defensive; ready to attack first. *But you will go into heat for me. I’ll make sure of it.*

***

Standing up to Freddie Lounds is *not* smart. It’s been less than three hours since their confrontation outside Port Haven, but her latest article is already up on TattleCrime.com and drawing an unfortunate amount of attention.

Jack’s voice tears at his skin, and Will bows his head against the Alpha’s anger. He clenches his teeth until his jaw aches and his ears ring, wondering how in the hell Hannibal can remain so poised, so *calm*, in the face of Jack’s rage. Dr Lecter relaxes in his chair, one long leg crossed over the other, casually propping up his chin as he considers Jack with mild interest. Is he feigning it, or does Jack’s fury really not bother him?

Jack’s tantrum is laughable. Hannibal lets the words wash over him, part of his mind wandering across the city to his recipe box for a spice-rubbed brisket – the other Alpha’s chest is broad and heavy with muscle, marbled with fat, and would go perfectly with bright pops of Piccolo tomatoes and garlic courgettes… Another part of his attention is fixed on Will, monitoring his mood, constantly tracking his true scent beneath his Beta fog. The Omega feels guilty, afraid and angry; a heady mix that reminds Hannibal of cognac and dark chocolate.

‘I'm just happy the story wasn't about Abigail Hobbs,’ Alana says, ever the buffer between Will and Jack, trying to soothe the raging Alpha.

Jack refuses to be appeased, however, and when he decides to allow Abigail to return home, using Hannibal’s proposal that it could prevent denial of the events, it is like a physical stab to Will’s gut. He can’t speak, though; Jack’s scent is too thick and his presence is too strong. It stops up his throat and pins his eyes to the floor in a show of submission. Even Alana struggles to look at him. Hannibal alone meets Jack’s gaze head on, and holds the contact until the other man blinks.

‘We have no way of knowing what's waiting for her when she goes home,’ Alana says, but her warning falls on deaf ears and she is left to mutter a curse under her breath as they leave the room.

Hannibal waits until he is alone with Will in the elevator before giving the Omega’s bicep a quick squeeze. The gesture is one of comfort and praise – Will pleased him in there – and Will responds as he hoped; closing his eyes and bowing his head, baring the nape of his neck

to Hannibal for a brief, tender moment. The skin flushes red, blotchy in its hesitation, and then Will clears his throat and steps away.

'I'll let Abigail know about Jack's decision,' he says, his voice thick and unsteady. As soon as the doors ping open, he jumps out into the safety of the corridor and begins to walk towards his office, talking over his shoulder in his hurry to put distance between them. 'See you tomorrow, Dr Lecter.'

Hannibal smiles to himself at Will's attempts to cover his growing attraction. The Omega's hormones will be all the stronger for his overuse of suppressants; unlike the neutralising compound used to pacify rutting Alphas, Omega suppressants merely wall off and squash the chemicals produced in heat. One of the reasons for the usual three-year-on, one-year-off pattern is that the resulting heat following the use of suppressants is longer and stronger than normal; draining for both Omega and Alpha in the pair. As far as Hannibal is aware, unbonded Omegas typically avoid suppressants in favour of experiencing uninhibited heats until they mate with an Alpha; it is unpleasant and requires isolation until it passes, but tolerable.

Will's body must be a raging inferno of frustrated desire. Hannibal feels pressure build behind his eyes again, his irises eager to glow red. He imagines denying Will any further chemical barriers to the blaze of pure, uninhibited passion that is an Omega in heat, and his pulse quickens.

He needs to destroy those pills.

***

Abigail is quiet on the way to the house. Will can feel her raw, stinging pain when she sees the graffiti on the garage and front doors.

Cannibals.

It's true – her father would have honoured every part of the girls. The FBI is never going to find them.

Hannibal keeps a close eye on Abigail as she leads Will through the house. When asked if she recognised the voice on the phone, the one warning her father that he had been discovered, her lie is perfect. No eye contact with him. No hesitation. Their little secret.

But she is clumsy in her second attempt at manipulation. When she suggests that they role-play the murder, that Will be her father and Hannibal be the man on the end of the phone, Alana looks concerned. Hannibal steers the conversation away, grateful for the distraction by the appearance of Abigail's friend, Marissa.

When she and Abigail slip outside, Alana uses the time to check in with Jack. Hannibal holds out a hand to Will, offering to help him up, blinking in surprise when the other man accepts. He had expected a rebuff, but it seems that Will's exhaustion is catching up with him.

‘How are you feeling, Will?’ Hannibal asks, pitching his voice soothingly low. Will takes a shaky breath and rolls his shoulders. He rubs a hand across the base of his skull, squeezing the nape of his neck. He is seeking comfort, but he cannot satisfy himself.

‘I think, sometimes, a part of me hates Jack,’ he admits softly. He glances at Hannibal, chewing his lip in regret. ‘I didn’t –’

‘Our little secret,’ Hannibal promises, offering him a dark smile. ‘Tell me; what dose of heat suppressants are you taking?’

Will flinches. *As many as I can before I throw them up*, he thinks. Out loud, he sighs and moves his hand to scrub at his stubbled cheeks.

‘Er… About 80mg, I think.’

Hannibal hums. A lie, and one he will not tolerate for long. But now is not the time.

‘And your local physician is responsible for the prescription?’ he checks. When Will ducks his head and avoids eye contact, it confirms his suspicion. Will has been floating between various doctors so as not to raise the suspicion that he is taking the suppressants continually.

‘Very well,’ Hannibal says heavily. ‘From now on, I will be responsible for issuing all of your medication.’ Will jerks his head up, his eyes flashing bright gold in anger and fear, but Hannibal holds his gaze, his face coldly blank. ‘This is not a negotiation, Will.’

They stay like that, gold-blue blazing into endless darkness, until Will’s fire burns out and he sags. The fight leaves his shoulders and he caves in on himself, making himself seem smaller. A tiny, half-formed whine catches in his throat, and Hannibal has to fight very hard not to close the distance between them and pull Will into a hug. He has to move slowly. Precisely.

Fuck, Will thinks, his throat bobbing around the pathetic little sound that just came out of him. He *hates* the way his body responds around the Alpha. Hates his lack of control. He ducks his head, glaring at Hannibal’s polished shoes, and forces himself to give a single nod of agreement.

Hannibal rewards him with a single purr. It’s low and deep in his chest, barely audible, but it slides like a drop of molten heat up Will’s spine to settle at his nape, flooding his body with endorphins until every inch of him tingles and he can feel himself getting slick. Distracted by the way his body is overreacting to a simple sound of praise, he barely hesitates when Hannibal requests the tablets. As their fingers brush, Will jumps with the snap of tension between them, something inside clenching and drawing up, his lower belly aching with need. Drawing back, he shivers at the goosebumps rising across his flesh.

He’s never felt so vulnerable.

‘You seem to be due more tablets, Will,’ Hannibal says, holding the bottle up and reading the label in the faint light from the window. ‘I’ll be sure to make up a new batch for you this evening.’

He considers the abhorrent medication for another few seconds, drawing out the torture for Will, and then hands the bottle back. He needs Will's complete trust in this, after all. Will offers Hannibal a twisted smile of thanks, pocketing the tablets in an instant. He takes half a step closer, taking a deep breath in. Hannibal's aftershave flows into him, cedarwood and cloves, caressing his nose and the glands on the top of his mouth with the aftertaste of the Alpha's scent. Hannibal is pleased with him.

'Thank you,' he murmurs, and he really means it. *I can trust you*. Hannibal will look after him.

Hannibal holds very still, allowing Will to come to him. If he moves now, tries to cup the side of his face the way he wants to, Will is likely to panic. So, he forces his hands to be still at his sides and smiles to himself when he feels the smaller man press up against his chest. Will rests his forehead against Hannibal's collar, the tip of his nose brushing Hannibal's coat, almost nuzzling him.

This is a bad idea, Will knows it is, but he can't seem to make himself stop. The silence between them is fragile, and Will is sure that his pounding heart is about to shatter it. *Please... please...* He's not even sure what he's asking for; if he wants Hannibal to hold still or move to hold him, wrap a strong arm around him or touch his forehead, stroke his back again…

And then he feels a prickle of cold, and he *knows* somebody else is here. He pulls back and turns to look outside. Abigail and Marissa are at the bottom of the leaf-strewn back yard, facing a strange young man. Marissa pulls her arm back and throws something – a stone perhaps.

'Shit.' Will takes off for the back door, Hannibal at his heels. They hurry down the slope, slowing as the intruder ducks away into the forest bordering the property. A woman comes up from behind and overtakes, her voice shrill with anger as she calls for her daughter to come home.

'Can you *stop* being such a bitch?' Marissa snaps. Hannibal narrows his eyes at her; she is a rude, insolent brat. He turns to watch as her mother escorts her away; perhaps another tableau is required…

Will gives Abigail's arm a reassuring squeeze and checks that the stranger has gone. He misses the blood-stained rock – Marissa's aim was true – and Hannibal uses his distraction to cover it with leaves. He doesn't want the FBI tracking the man down. He will be back, for Abigail, and Hannibal wants to see what she will do when she has to defend her life.

A family together, born in blood. He will give Will a daughter, one way or another.

***

It's a dream. He knows it's a dream because the stag is there, watching him. It lifts his head, ebony feathers ruffling on its neck.

‘I’m sorry, okay?’ He gasps the words into Abigail’s hair, his nose filled with the salty sweet scent of her fear. ‘This will all stop. *Please*.’ He wraps his arms more tightly around her, holding her still even as she struggles against him. ‘I’m gonna make it all go away…’

He slides the knife across her throat, her flesh parting for him like butter. The stag tosses its head back, dark eyes flashing in pain, and then it staggers, stumbles and falls. It’s so *beautiful*…

Will wakes with a start, drenched in sweat and shaking hard enough to rattle his teeth. The alarm is beeping at him, shrill and demanding. Where is he? *Who* is he?

Reaching out, Will slaps the clock silent. God… His body *hurts*. Swinging his legs out of the damp sheets, the cold morning air stings his flesh. He hunches over himself, trying to scrub the dream from his retinas. He feels dirty – polluted by the darkness of his own mind.

All he wants to do is curl up in a nest of soft blankets and pillows, soaking up the warmth of an Alpha’s chest behind him. But he can’t do that; he has to drag himself up, get showered and dressed and go out into the harsh world to Garrett Jacob Hobbs’s hunting cabin. It’s going to be painful; Abigail will be hurting, and there was so much violence there that the air will still be razor sharp with it.

Hannibal… I need you… I can’t do this on my own…

Will growls to himself at the pathetic little mewling sound bubbling up from his chest. He jerks to his feet and wrenches his t-shirt over his head. Is he hot or cold? He can’t tell. He grabs up the new heat suppressants that Dr Lecter brought round last night, and swallows his morning dose before ripping open the curtains in an attempt to banish the shadow from tickling up and down his spine. Claws stroke through his curling hair, scratching at the tingling heat on the back of his neck. He could just let go… Fall into the warm current and let it drag him down. *Become* someone else… forever…

Will braces himself against the window, staring up at the cloudy sky. His palms must be hot – his touch leaves a foggy outline on the cold glass. He squints against a headache building behind his eyes, his mind drifting back to the moment yesterday, when he leant against Hannibal’s chest and felt peaceful...

He swallows the lump forming in his throat. He has to get ready.

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Climbing the stairs to the loft to find the source of the blood dripping onto Abigail’s forehead, Will *knows* he should have listened to his screaming gut when they first entered the cabin. His heart falters when he sees the body, bruised and bloody, impaled on a pair of antlers and displayed with gruesome callousness. This was *humiliation*. The killer was *angry* with her.

Abigail’s scream tears at him.

‘Marissa!’

His lips tingle and the ground comes up to meet him as Abigail's emotions swamp him. Fear, breath-taking sorrow and icy guilt. Will has to hang onto the wall for support, even after Alana has escorted Abigail outside to calm her down before driving her back to the house.

When Jack arrives, scowling to show his displeasure, Will draws closer to Hannibal and brushes his fingertips across the Alpha's coat sleeve. It's not much, but he's not sure he can do without it right now. He doesn't know if Hannibal notices; if he does, he allows it without pushing for more.

'You brought Abigail Hobbs Back to Minnesota to find out if she was involved in her father's murders, and another girl dies,' Jack growls. He squares his shoulders, looming over Will as he leaves Hannibal's side to check between Marissa's blue-stained lips.

'Yes; he scraped his knuckle on her teeth. There's foreign tissue and what could be trace amounts of blood…' He tries to ignore the way Jack is *humming* with fury, but the Alpha's scent is strong and smoky, thick with anger, and Will can feel himself start to shrink.

'You said that this copycat was an intelligent psychopath, Will. That there would be *no* traceable motive; no pattern. He wouldn't kill again this way.' Jack's voice is like acid. '*You said it*.'

'I may have been wrong about that,' Will mutters, trying not to look too closely at Jack's rage-red eyes. *Please, please just leave me alone*, he thinks.

'*Yes*,' Jack says coldly. 'Because Garrett Jacob *Hobbs* never struck his victims. Why would the copycat do it?'

'I think he was provoked,' Hannibal says, stepping in to draw some of Jack's attention to himself. Will is trembling; he looks close to tears. Or anger. His emotions are a maelstrom behind his gold-ringed eyes. 'Nicholas Boyle murdered this girl and his own sister.' The lie is smooth; Hannibal can see it take root in Jack's fertile mind. He is so ready to find the killer; influencing him is laughably easy.

'With or without Abigail Hobbs?' he asks.

'Without,' Will says firmly. *Leave it alone, Jack. For once in your life. Drop it.*

'Well, do you think that Abigail Hobbs knew Nicholas or Cassie Boyle?'

'No.'

Jack turns back to Will, scenting the air and honing in on his distress.

'You don't think she knew them, or you don't *want* to think that she knew them?'

It's too much. Will can feel his resolve start to crumble. To his horror, a small, submissive whine slithers out of his mouth and he's hanging his head, baring his neck before he can stop himself.

‘She said she didn't know them,’ he whispers. It’s a pitiful response, and they both know he’s lost to Jack’s stronger character.

‘Dr Bloom says that Abigail has a penchant for manipulation.’ Jack steps even closer, towering over Will and flooding him with his scent. When he speaks, his voice is soft, but there is a sharp undercurrent that makes Will flinch. ‘Is she manipulating you, Will?’

Enough. Hannibal barely restrains a growl at the way the other Alpha is threatening his Omega. He cannot appear too protective, not at this stage, but he will not tolerate this behaviour for a moment longer.

‘Agent Crawford,’ he warns. He straightens his back, squaring his shoulders and drawing himself up to his full height. Fills the loft with his presence, suppressing the itch of red in his eyes. He has to remain in control of his emotions if he is to prove his dominance over Jack Crawford, and as a source of stability for Will.

Jack sighs but he accepts Hannibal’s greater dominance, visibly backing down and stepping away from the Omega.

‘Look, he said he was wrong about the copycat killer. I want to know what else he's wrong about,’ he says, trying to sound reasonable. Justifying his exploitation of Will’s biology.

‘Whoever killed the girl on the field killed this girl, I'm right about that,’ Will says, working hard to keep his voice steady. All he wants to do is go to Hannibal and curl up against his chest, tuck his head under Hannibal’s chin and bury his face in the cedarwood smell of his coat. Instead, he forces himself to keep looking at Marissa’s corpse. ‘He knew *exactly* how to mount the body. Wound patterns are almost identical to Cassie Boyle. Same design. The same… *humiliation*.’

She deserved nothing better, Hannibal thinks, allowing himself a fleeting moment of fantasy in which, one day, he can share his craft with Will. Aloud, he says,

‘Abigail Hobbs is not a killer. But she could be the target of one.’

His warning has the desired effect, and Jack clears his throat.

‘I think it's time that Abigail Hobbs left home *permanently*,’ he says. He turns to the other Alpha. ‘Doctor, would you be good enough to collect Abigail, and all of her belongings, and escort her out of Minnesota, please?’

Hannibal slides his eyes to Will, barely parting his lips but catching the tang of the Omega’s distress. His stomach clenches with anger at the situation – he cannot refuse Jack’s request without an argument, but Will *needs* him to stay.

He catches himself. Will *needs* him? His own instincts are getting the better of him. If he is to unlock the dark potential in Will’s mind, it is necessary for Will to be vulnerable. Upset. Abandoning him on Jack’s order is the perfect opportunity to further damage his psyche. To make the cracks that will allow his darkness to consume him. Free him.

Hannibal dips his head in a brief nod and slips from the loft, barely a whisper of footfalls on the stairs. Will's heart skips a beat and he takes a step after him, but Jack blocks his escape, red-ringed eyes boring holes into him.

'Not you, Will,' the Alpha growls. 'I want you *here*.'

***

Sitting on the step of the ambulance, Will feels numb. Nicholas Boyle attacked Abigail. Knocked Dr Bloom unconscious and struck Dr Lecter on the back of the head. Alana doesn't remember anything more than a blur out of the corner of her eye.

Will's shadow-self paces behind the bars of his ribcage, rumbling, demanding blood be shed.

He hurt Hannibal.

He will hunt him down, track him through the woods and bleed the life from him for what he's done. An eye for an eye.

'Where's Abigail?' Alana asks, interrupting his dark fantasy. Will swallows, tasting the salt of an imagined throat torn open beneath fangs and claws.

'Er, Lecter took her back to the hotel,' he mutters. He can't bring himself to say Hannibal's name. Not now. Not when it's all he can do to keep himself from taking his gun and shooting his way through anyone between him and Nicholas Boyle.

You hurt my Alpha. The whisper is hypnotic. It kisses his lips with promises of violence. *I'll kill you. I'm going to find you, hunt you and destroy you.*

He's standing before he's even realised what he's doing. Jack frowns at him.

'Where are you going?' he asks.

To kill Nicholas Boyle. To find Hannibal. To…

Will sags. He is empty. Drained. Too tired even to breathe.

'I wanna go home,' he croaks, begging Jack with gold-rimmed eyes. He needs this. Needs to be in his nest, surrounded by his dogs, comforted by their familiar scent and gentle licks. His whole body screams *please, have mercy on me*, and he's certain there's a soft whimper catching in his throat.

Jack's expression softens and he nods. He can't justify keeping the exhausted Omega any longer. Will swallows again, offering a twist of his lips as thanks.

On his way to the car, he pops his last suppressant of the day. Slumping down behind the wheel, he rolls the little bottle around his palm, considering Hannibal's insistence at managing his medication. *You want to provide for me*, he thinks. It warms his chest and tugs at the corners of his mouth. *Be careful, Dr Lecter; your Alpha is showing.*

The engine starts with a rasping turn and Will fiddles with the dial on the heater. He's hot but cold – his body is confused, swinging wildly between goosebumps and sweat. Maybe he should ask Dr Lecter about it…

It's an hour or so to the airport, and then a red-eye to Virginia before he can drive home. His fingers brush over his phone, again and again, as he considers and dismisses the idea of calling Hannibal's cell.

Finally, after returning the rental car and realising that he's got to wait at least forty-five minutes for his flight, he gives in.

Hannibal answers on the second ring, as composed as always but sounding pleased to hear from him.

'Hello, Will.'

The moment he hears him, Will finds himself falling over his own tongue. He just wants to sit down and *be* with Hannibal; not talk, just rest. But he can't; they are miles apart and he needs to have a reason for calling.

'How's Abigail?' he asks, his voice quivering.

'She's coping well; all things considered.' Hannibal speaks calmly and precisely, and Will flounders again. He sighs, turns and scrubs at the back of his head.

'… Good… That's… good…'

'You sound tired, Will.'

'Yeah.' Will huffs a laugh of agreement. Sinks onto a sticky plastic chair and drops his bag between his feet. 'I might get some sleep on the plane.'

'You're going home.' It's not a question, but Will still nods and hums confirmation.

'When will *you* be flying back?' he asks.

'Tomorrow evening,' Hannibal says. 'I imagine you will already be curled up in a nest of soft blankets and warm throws by the time I am boarding my flight.'

Will's stomach flips and he imagines snuggling up next to Hannibal on the plane, falling asleep with his head on the other man's shoulder, breathing in deep to savour his scent of musk and cloves.

'I, er, don't have a nest,' he admits quietly, looking around to make sure he's not going to be overheard. 'Just a bed. Normal. Like everyone else.'

There's silence for a moment, and then Hannibal speaks.

'You fear the things that make you unique,' he murmurs, his syrupy rich voice flowing down the line to settle, molten hot, at the nape of Will's neck. 'Why do you not have a nest, Will?'

Will gulps. He's sweating now; he can feel beads prickling his forehead and his shirt is clinging to the base of his spine.

'I don't need one.'

'Hm.' Hannibal hums a neutral sound. Neither agreeing or disagreeing. Will isn't sure how he feels about that. He taps his fist against his thigh and bounces his knee.

'Anyway, I have to go,' he lies. 'They're calling my flight. I just wanted to check on Abigail.'

'Of course. I'll see you soon,' Hannibal says, accepting the excuse. Then, to add a sting to his words, he adds, 'I hope you sleep well in your bed, Will.'

Will hangs up and stares down at the black screen. *Sleep well…* The words taunt him. Both he and Hannibal know that one of the reasons he has nightmares is because he doesn't feel safe at night. A nest would help with that, but Will sees it as a failure; as giving in to his biology disorder.

God. He wipes his hands over his face, scratching at his stubble. He should go and spray himself before he boards the plane.

An hour later, Will stares past his reflection in the plane window and watches the blinking lights of the airport. There is a bonded couple across the aisle from him; the Alpha tucks his Omega mate under his arm and wraps her in a fluffy blanket, placing a comforting kiss on her forehead as she relaxes against him, ready to sleep through the journey. There's a familiar stab in his chest and Will notices that his eyes are edged with gold. He glances down, twisting his shaking hands together in his lap.

'I've got you,' the Alpha murmurs, his voice pitched low to be soothing. Will swallows hard, feeling his throat tighten around an unhappy little sound. He takes a deep breath and looks back at the window, hating that it is easier to imagine Hannibal beside him, a steadying hand on his knee, than it is to pretend he doesn't *need* him there. He closes his eyes and rests his head back on the seat, trying, and failing, to calm his heartrate down.

What are you doing to me, Hannibal? Why can't I stop thinking about you?

OEuf

Chapter Summary

Jack Crawford has Will investigating a series of murders committed by children, which sparks disturbing memories for the Omega. Seeking support from Hannibal, Will begins to explore his biology and sexuality with the Alpha. As they get closer, Will and Hannibal find themselves battling their own instincts, and Will must face his fear about being touched by an Alpha.

Chapter Notes

Hey peeps, I've edited this chapter since originally writing it. I wasn't happy with how fast Will and Hannibal moved (sexually), so I've made it more emotional, instead. :-)

As always, thank you SO MUCH for your amazing feedback. It is always welcome and very much appreciated. If you spot any errors/typos etc, feel free to let me know and I'll pop on and amend as required.

Enjoy, my lovelies!

FOUR

OEuf

Sitting in Hannibal's office, cradled in a deep leather armchair, Will feels the last knots of tension loosen out of his shoulders. Hannibal's warm scent hovers in the air, caressing him and soothing him. He's been looking forward to his session ever since Dr Lecter confirmed a regular slot in his diary. He spent several hours wondering what he was going to talk about – he'd gone for a walk in the dark fields to clear his head in the vain hope of getting a good night's sleep, but now, as he looks into Hannibal's calmly expectant face, he feels the blockage shrivel in his throat and the words begin to flow, stuttering at first and then smoothly.

'Sometimes… at night… I leave the lights on in my little house, and…walk across the flat fields… When I look back from a distance, the house is like a boat on the sea. It's really the only time I feel safe.'

Hannibal considers this. To feel safe when alone… adrift in a sea of darkness… Clinging to the façade of his life with the same desperation that a drowning man might cling to a lifejacket. Will wants to know his shadow self, he just doesn't know how to ask for it.

He sits forwards, clasping his hands before him, giving Will his full attention.

'You stood in the breathing silence of Garett Jacob Hobbs' home, the very spaces he moved through,' he says. 'Tell me, Will… did they speak to you?'

'With noise and… *clarity*,' Will says, his voice trembling.

'You could sense his madness,' Hannibal suggests. He's read about Omegan empathy – the ability to feel *vibrations* in a place. He's not sure how scientific those studies have been, but after watching Will in the Hobbs's residence, watching his monster stir, he can believe it. 'Like a bloodhound.'

Will swallows. Grips the armrests hard enough to make the leather creak. Invisible claws rake his hair and his darkness rumbles inside his chest.

'I tried *so hard* to get to know Garrett Jacob Hobbs,' he whispers. He can see the kitchen again. The way the afternoon sunlight streamed through the windows, lighting Abigail's auburn hair to fire. She was so scared. He was going to make it all stop… The current pulls at him, dragging him down…

But he's still talking; still with Hannibal. The Alpha grounds him; anchors him. Stops him from sliding away in the river of memories. *My paddle.*

'Past the slides and phials; beyond the lines of the police report, between the pixels of all those printed faces of sad dead girls…'

His voice is monotonous, a flat stream of thought. He doesn't have to pretend around Hannibal. Doesn't have to *be* anything, or anyone but exactly who he is.

Garett Jacob Hobbs smiles at him, bubbling blood from between bitten lips.

See?

The whisper is *in* him. It's his shadow. His soul. An ebony stag…

Hannibal can see Will start to tremble. Sees the ring of molten gold thickening around his eyes, drowning out the stormy blue.

'How did you feel seeing Marissa Schurr, impaled in his antler room?' he asks softly.

Will quivers. His mind is opening up, reaching for Hannibal's. He's not just *himself* anymore. He can't be. He can't contain this all inside one body. He drops his gaze to the floor.

‘Guilty,’ he admits.

‘Because you couldn’t save her?’ Hannibal asks.

Do you know me, Will? You sense a connection… How far are you willing to let it go?

‘Because… I felt like *I* killed her…’ Will whispers. He glances up into Hannibal’s face, heat burning the back of his neck at the hungry glint in Hannibal’s dark eyes. Are they tinged with red? In the dim light of the office, it’s impossible to tell. How does his confession make Hannibal feel? He can’t read anything in that impassive face, in the perfectly still body. Hannibal is the picture of self-control. He gives him nothing; makes him beg for scraps of emotion.

I would, he thinks. *You could make me beg. You could hurt me.*

The darkness inside him rises like a wave, propelling him forwards, to lean towards the Alpha, baring his teeth even as he curls his hands into fists, his nails cutting into his palms.

‘I got *so close* to him,’ he snarls. ‘Sometimes… I felt like we were doing the same things at different times of day… like I was eating…or showering or sleeping at the same time he was.’

Hannibal keeps his lips from tightening. Will is seeking a response from him, trying to goad him into reacting. The Omega is so desperate for a mate, someone worthy of his dark power and inspiration, that he formed an emotional bond with Garett Jacob Hobbs, simply because Hobbs was an Alpha. But it is merely a shadow, a hollow imitation of the true connection *he* will give to Will.

How strong is Will’s urge to bond, he wonders. To check, he asks,

‘Even after he was dead?’

If Will confirms, he will show such promise that Hannibal isn’t certain he will be able to contain the purr itching to rise in his throat.

‘Even after he was dead,’ Will says heavily, sinking back in the chair. He’s exhausted, and what had started the day as a dull headache behind his eyes is escalating into throbbing agony.

Hannibal keeps his sound down, but barely. When he speaks, his voice is gravelly.

‘Like you were becoming him?’ he asks, tilting his head to examine the muscle jumping in Will’s jaw. He can see the strain around Will’s gold-tinged eyes. His new heat suppressants are, in fact, powerful scent suppressants, with only a hint of hormone moderator in the new blend. The Iris Inhibitors remain the same, albeit more powerful, and will work to disguise the unavoidable detox that the Omega is about to undergo.

Forcing Will to come off such a lethal dose of suppressants will not be pleasant for him, but he needs this; Hannibal will not have a potential partner poison himself. Will's emotions will be boiling near the surface; he will experience migraines, headaches and hallucinations, and then he will go into heat, an uncontrolled and raging inferno. But he will survive. He will show the world who, and what, he truly is.

And Hannibal will be there, guiding him.

'I know who I am,' Will growls. He glares into Hannibal's face. He wants to get up, go to him… Hurt him? Kiss him? He settles for baring his teeth again. 'I'm *not* Garett Jacob Hobbs, Dr Lecter.'

'No, you're not,' Hannibal says warmly. He stands up and offers a hand to Will. A reward. The Omega needs physical contact to calm him. Hannibal will offer himself, his touch, his scent, his words, in order to create that place of safety. To foster Will's trust in him. Training him. Conditioning him.

Will's breath catches. He stares at Hannibal's hand, at the strong palm and long fingers. He wants to take it, hold it to his hot lips and press damp kisses to it. Leave a glistening trail of affection up Hannibal's arm, to his jaw, his throat…

Snatching hold of the Alpha's warm hand, his stomach flips as Hannibal pulls him to his feet in a show of strength. Hannibal could throw him across the room if he wanted to. Alphas are strong by nature, especially when compared to Omegas. Hannibal feels exceptionally strong, and that makes Will feel very small and vulnerable around him. It doesn't rattle him as much as it used to. When did *that* change?

Hannibal, however, merely guides him in closer, and wraps both arms around his shoulders. He tucks Will's head under his chin, breathing in deep to savor Will's sweet scent. He hasn't refreshed his Beta pheromone spray since leaving work, and there is only a faint trace now of the chemicals on his hair and clothes. He smells wild; of the woods and rivers, of blood and sweat and the hunt.

At the feel of his cheek against Hannibal's hard chest, soaking up the musk, cedarwood and cloves of the Alpha, Will's throat loosens around a moan. He nuzzles into Hannibal's jacket, lifting his arms and hugging the other man's slim waist.

'I wouldn't have pegged you as someone fond of *cuddling*, Dr Lecter,' he says softly. He savors Hannibal's warmth for a minute and then steps back. Looks up into Hannibal's face, at the tiny, dark smile and gleaming eyes. Hannibal loops his arms around Will's neck, caging him in. He refuses to allow him to leave now that he has him so near.

'There's a lot you don't know about me,' he says, and he doesn't miss the spark of interest in Will's gold-blue eyes.

'I'd like to,' Will says, stepping closer again. He can feel the warm puff of Hannibal's breath on his face; smell remnants of coffee and wine. All things uniquely *Hannibal*. 'I'd like to know you, Dr Lecter.'

Hannibal stares down at Will's face. At the flushed lips, the tendon rippling in his throat when he swallows and the sheen of sweat on his forehead.

Their chests are touching now. Feet alternating. They are stealing oxygen from each other. Will stares into Hannibal's eyes, trying to work out the exact shade of brown around Hannibal's wide pupils, hemmed in by dark red. They're *beautiful*.

'Then you shall,' Hannibal murmurs, loosening one hand to cup the side of Will's face, rubbing his thumb across the stubble on Will's cheek. 'But first, tell me, Will; why do you consider your Omega biology to be a disorder?'

Will flinches and tenses up in Hannibal's grip. For a moment, Hannibal is certain he will pull away, perhaps even turn his back on him; cross the room and put distance between them. Then Will sighs, as though too tired to fight any longer, and bows his head to rest his forehead on Hannibal's chest. The nape of his neck will be exposed, and Hannibal's heart skips a beat at the idea of it. He still has a hand on Will's back – he slides it up to rest between his shoulder-blades, then higher, until he's *almost* touching the smooth, creamy skin… Even through Will's jacket and shirt, he can feel a ridge of scar tissue, and he wants to remove Will's clothing to see it. How did he get it? When?

'Omegas are soft,' Will mutters. '*Weak*.'

'A bold assumption,' Hannibal says. 'One that many would argue is false.'

Will huffs a bitter laugh and bunches his hands into fists in the back of Hannibal's suit. He clenches his teeth, holding on tight as though afraid of falling if he lets go. The silence drags on, broken only by the steady tick of the clock on Hannibal's desk, and the faint rasp of their breath, the thud of their heartbeats. Will swallows and tries again.

'Everything that's written about Omegas, everything I *see*…' He shakes his head, his throat tightening.

'It doesn't match who you feel you are inside,' Hannibal finishes. At Will's nod, he swallows. As much as he wants to slide his hand higher, to touch Will in his most vulnerable place, he knows it's too soon. For now. Instead, he slides his hand back down and settles it in the small of Will's back. They stay like that for a while, neither of them speaking, the silence broken only by the tick of the clock on Hannibal's desk and the thud of their hearts.

I don't want to go, Will thinks, staring across the office, at the flash of headlights from traffic outside. *I don't want to be alone*.

'Our time is up,' Hannibal murmurs, releasing Will and taking a step backwards. The distance between them is like ice in his veins, and Will shivers. Goes to wrap his arms around himself and then thinks better of it and shoves his hands into his pockets. He can't bring himself to look at Hannibal; he's never been this physically close to someone who wasn't a lover before. How normal is this?

'Same time next week?' Hannibal checks, dipping his head to catch Will's eye. The Omega is rattled; he was comfortable; relaxed in Hannibal's presence, and now he feels vulnerable.

That's it, Will. Need me.

Will forces himself to nod. He *wants* to stay, but he knows he can't. Hannibal needs to get home; he doesn't need some overly emotional Omega getting clingy. *Weak.*

'I'll see you soon, Will,' Hannibal says. It's delicious; watching the turmoil create a storm of emotion in Will's eyes. He's looking forward to the day when he creates a different kind of storm within him.

Will nods again. He can't seem to find his voice; as though stepping away from Hannibal has lodged a block of ice in his throat and he can't melt it by himself, no matter how hot his body feels. Hot and tingling… He can feel the slick dampening his inner thighs, sticking his boxers to his skin, and it makes him cringe. He needs to shower.

He ducks out of the office and makes it all the way down to his car before releasing a slow, shaking breath. Grips tight to the steering wheel, and stares at the gold in his eyes, at the shadow dancing in the blue.

It wasn't just at the hospital, he thinks, clenching a fist so tight his nails cut into his palm. *I can't stop it. I'm falling for you.*

***

Another case. Two families, executed at dinner, the mothers saved for last. Jack Crawford has "borrowed" Will's imagination again, whisking him away to get into the mind of the killer. Will has asked Hannibal to look after his dogs. He trusts him to care for his own family. Handed his keys over without hesitation.

Hannibal pulls up outside the little house and cuts the engine of his car. The sun is shining down on the flat, barren fields, casting a golden glow to the autumn leaves desperately clinging to trees in the distance. He takes with him a brown paper bag; sausages from his own larder. When he unlocks the door, he makes the dogs sit and wait before feeding them. They welcome him, greet him with happy whines and wagging tails. They accept him; he is wearing the same shirt that has Will's scent on it, and he made sure not to wash it.

Now that the dogs have been placated, it is time to explore.

Will's home is small but filled with belongings. Books crammed onto shelves and left to gather dust on side tables. An old piano, out of tune and forgotten in the corner. A bare-stone fireplace dominates the living area; how often does Will curl up on the rug with his dogs before crackling flames, trying to keep warm as the snow falls outside?

It is a sad and *lonely* house. Hannibal pulls open Will's drawers, frowning at the rows of neatly folded t-shirts, socks and boxers. Pristine. Military.

Trying to create order out of chaos. Do you sense yourself spinning out of control, Will?

A large desk soaks up the light beneath the front window. Will's fishing gear is stacked, somewhat haphazardly, against the wall to its left, leaving a clear space in the center of the table for him to focus on creating his fly fishing lures. Hannibal leans down to inspect his latest creation; half-finished and clearly interrupted. Most likely by Jack.

Does this bring you comfort, Will? A sense of peace, as you create something with which to bait and kill something?

Hannibal sits. He can see how Will creates it. It is delicate and beautiful. He wants to help him with it. He also wants to add a piece of evidence; insurance, in case Will gets out of hand. Hannibal adds a piece of sausage meat to the tip, tossing the rest to one of the dogs hovering, expectantly, by his side, and then completes the lure.

How sharp is the hook? Does Will snag his fish quickly, or let them suffer? Hannibal tests it, watching, detached, at the bead of blood welling on his thumb.

I want to smear you with blood, Will. I want to watch you kill.

***

'Tell me about your mother,' Hannibal says, staring deep into Will's eyes and watching the gold flare bright with fear and anger.

'Some *lazy* psychiatry, Dr Lecter,' Will says, spitting acid with every word. He can't help it; ever since seeing dead Mrs. Turner in the morgue, he's been thrumming with tension. Snapping at everyone. 'Low hanging fruit?'

'I suspect that fruit is on a high branch,' Hannibal replies, unruffled in the face of Will's aggression. The Omega is upset; brow furrowed in pain, jaw working to grind away the headache showing in the shadows under his eyes. How many hours of sleep did Will get last night? Three, four at most. How terrible the nightmares must be. 'Very difficult to reach.'

'So is my mother,' Will says, his mouth turning down in an unhappy grimace. He shakes his head. 'Never knew her.'

'An interesting place to start,' Hannibal says, and it is. An Omega without a mother? Did she die, perhaps, or abandon him when she discovered what she had bred into the world? Either would hurt Will terribly, but Hannibal is more drawn to the idea that Will was rejected.

Will takes a deep breath, blows it out and rolls his neck, trying to relieve the knots that just *won't* loosen this time, no matter how comfortable the chair is or how good Dr Lecter smells. He can't shake the clinging feeling that he's under a microscope. He can't do it. He can't be this vulnerable around Hannibal. Around anyone.

'Tell me about *your* mother,' he snaps. 'Let's start there.'

So defensive, Will. Jack has wound you tight enough to snap.

Hannibal can feel his instincts warring with his dark desire to watch Will shatter the illusion of humanity. He cannot go to him, soothe him or comfort him. To do so would be like helping a moth escape its cocoon. Will must go through this pain alone, to emerge all the stronger for it.

'Both my parents died when I was very young,' he says simply. 'The proverbial orphan until I was adopted by my Uncle Robertos when I was sixteen.'

Will glances off to the side, fighting with the pain raking at his chest. Hannibal might hide the grief from his face, from his still body in the check suit and white tie, but it's there, and Will can *feel* it. *There's so much more to you, Dr Lecter*.

'You have orphan in common with Abigail Hobbs,' he mutters.

'I think you'll discover that you and I have a great deal in common with Abigail,' Hannibal says. 'She's already demonstrated an aptitude for the psychological.' *She manipulated you, Will, and you allowed it.*

Will considers this for a moment. He's tired. As much as he enjoys the banter with Hannibal, his headache is proving too distracting to keep it up. He releases a long, slow breath and tries to rub the dirt feeling from his hands onto his thighs.

'There's something so *foreign* about family,' he says, the word tasting bitter in his mouth. He looks off across the room; he can't stand to see Hannibal right now. To tell an Alpha that he, an Omega, doesn't want a family is as good as saying that he's broken. Too damaged to be repaired. 'Like an ill-fitting suit. I… never connected to the concept.'

Hannibal takes a moment to analyze his emotional reaction to this. Will is being honest with him; painfully so, exposed and vulnerable to him. Even the way he is sitting; legs spread, hands to either side, showing Hannibal his slim chest and stomach… Hannibal is more guarded. One leg crossed over the other, hands clasped in his lap. He stares down at Will, at the reason for a drafty house in the middle of nowhere, filled with stray dogs and books but no photographs. No signs of connection.

'You created a family for yourself,' he says softly. Will scoffs.

'I, er, connected to a family of strays,' he says, and then he gives Hannibal a tiny flash of a smile. 'And *thank you* for feeding them while I was away.'

Hannibal nods in acceptance of the gratitude, but he doesn't smile.

'I was referring to Abigail,' he says. It hits Will; has he not realized he is forming a bond with her, as well?

The Omega is beginning to worry; Will's scent is sharpening with distress and Hannibal decides to give him a moment's respite.

‘Tell me about the Turner family; were they affluent? Well-to-do?’

Will’s lips tighten.

‘They lived like they had money,’ he says, somewhat bitter. Hannibal notes it; notes its weakness. *You are showing me your cracks, Will. That’s good. Let me in.*

‘Did your family have money, Will?’

‘We were poor,’ Will snaps back, almost instantly. He’s angry about it. ‘I followed my father from the boatyards of Biloxi and Greenville, to lake boats on Erie.’ He gives Hannibal a tiny, sad smile, but it is still beautiful.

Hannibal can see it now; a breathtakingly pretty Omega boy, trailing after his father – a Beta, no doubt – catching unwanted attention wherever he went. How many offers of mating did his father receive? How much money was Will worth to some Alphas? And how many times was his father tempted by it?

‘Always the new boy at school,’ Hannibal says, catching his eye. ‘Always the stranger.’

Another sad smile.

‘Always,’ Will nods. *Always moving on before I got us into trouble with my heats, before we could afford suppressants.*

‘What grudge was Mrs. Turner’s killer harboring against her?’ Hannibal asks. Will has had enough for one day. He needs to rest now.

‘Motherhood,’ Will says, gripping tight to the chair. He’s so *tired*. So raw. His head is being crushed in a vice and all he wants to do is lie down on a soft bed and try to sleep.

‘Not motherhood,’ Hannibal says. ‘A perversion of it.’ He lets his words sink in for a moment, lets Will absorb them and feed them to his shadow monster. *This is how you will catch the killer*. ‘You look tired, Will,’ he says, moving the conversation forward. ‘Are you sleeping well?’

Will reaches up to rub the back of his neck; a subconscious attempt to Gentle himself. To ease his suffering through manipulating the sensitive nerves at the base of his skull.

‘Not *particularly*,’ he admits. ‘I get a few good hours a night.’

That will only get worse, Hannibal thinks, but he doesn’t comment. Instead, he simply nods, considering the response.

‘Have you ever allowed yourself to be Gentled?’

As predicted, Will’s head snaps up and he frowns at Hannibal.

‘*What?*’ he whispers. ‘Why would you even *ask* that?’

Hannibal quirks an eyebrow, barely able to keep from grinning at the blushing affront of the other man.

‘Because you seem tense,’ he says. ‘And it might help you to get a better rest.’

Will shakes his head, short and sharp. His heart is pounding. A hug, even a *cuddle* is one thing, but *Gentling*…? It’s normally reserved for a mated pair, and involves the manipulation of sensitive pressure points on an Omega’s neck, around and over where their crest would be. It requires complete trust, because an Alpha can be in total control of an Omega’s body when they hold the back of their necks.

‘There are a number of techniques that you can practice on yourself,’ Hannibal persists. He had expected Will’s refusal, and accounted for it. ‘I can show you; if you’d like.’

Will hesitates. Bites his lip. He looks down at his right hand. It’s trembling, tensing and spasming against his thigh. It’s been doing that since the Turner house.

‘I, er, I don’t think that would be a good idea,’ he says quietly.

‘Why?’ Hannibal asks, cocking his head to the side. Will barks a laugh.

‘Um…’ He looks down. Grinds his back teeth. *Because I’d try to kiss you,* he thinks. ‘Because...’ *I wouldn’t be in control, anymore.* ‘… I wouldn’t be *comfortable* with it.’

Hannibal keeps from narrowing his eyes, but he sits forwards, catching Will’s attention again.

‘Very well. But allow me to explain a particular move. I’d like you to try it before you go to sleep.’

Will is visibly shaking now. He shrinks back into the chair, trying to make himself small. Insignificant. As if such a thing would ever be possible.

‘Why?’ he whispers. Hannibal tilts his head and offers him a small smile.

‘I want to help you, Will.’

There is a long pause. Will is trying to think of a reason not to, but the idea of obeying Hannibal, of touching his neck before he sleeps, *because* Hannibal told him to, is making his insides twitch and clench. He hesitates for a second longer and then nods.

Hannibal gestures for him to sit forwards as well, and twists in the chair, demonstrating the squeezing, massaging motion on the back of his own neck for Will to see.

‘Rub circles with your thumb,’ he says. ‘And here, with your fingers.’ He turns back to find Will rapt, his eyes dull gold in the low light of the office, lips parted and glistening where he’s licked them. Hannibal smiles at him and reaches across, taking Will’s hot hand in both of his own and lifting it to his neck. He makes the Omega hold his own throat, squeezing so that Will wraps his fingers under his jaw. ‘Grip tight for support,’ he says quietly, his voice rough with the need to purr at how attractive Will looks, holding himself in a choke. ‘Squeeze to counter the pressure at your nape.’

Will can't move. He's holding tight, fingertips digging into his throbbing artery. The back of his neck is iron-hot, tingling and prickling uncomfortably. He's hard; his trousers do nothing to hide it, and Hannibal's eyes lock onto it. The Alpha flicks the tip of his tongue out, tasting the air, and Will blushes when he feels slick dampen the backs of his thighs. He'll have left some on the chair, he's sure. Hannibal will be able to smell it; taste it in the air between them.

Oh, darlin'...

Coby's voice slithers inside his ear and Will feels the sting of a blade through his shoulder. Hot breath on his throat and concrete under his bruised, scraped palms. Panic is like a bucket of ice, killing his erection and replacing arousal with dread.

'Stop!' he gasps, his voice thin and faltering. 'Stop, I…'

He releases each side of his neck and jerks to his feet. Stumbles backwards, away from the Alpha, feeling sick with humiliation at the idea of the glistening wet on the chair seat, his heart racing with panic at the memory of being pinned before. Being vulnerable around an Alpha. 'I have to… er…' He grabs at his hair, tugging on the curls before gesturing towards the door, his brow creased and eyes damp. 'I should *go*.'

'Will,' Hannibal says, rising quickly, curious and concerned by the Omega's fearful reaction. 'Wait, stay.' He doesn't reach for the Omega, sensing his barely-contained terror, but extends his hand towards the drinks cabinet, instead. 'Would you like a drink?'

'I… er…' Will paces back and forth, considering the request. Hating the slithering, swirling fear still lingering like a bad taste. He clenches his back teeth and sets his jaw, refusing to surrender to his weakness. To the memory of what was done to him. 'Yeah. Yeah, I'll stay.'

Hannibal moves quickly, pouring them each a generous whiskey and holding out the crystal tumbler before Will can change his mind.

'Scottish Single Malt, fifteen-years-aged in an oak barrel,' he says, clinking their rims together.

Will takes the glass and glances down at the amber liquid, the firelight glinting off the spirit and setting it afire. He's not sure he can stomach it, but it would be rude to turn it down and he doesn't want to be alone…

He sighs and takes a careful sip, savoring the burn down his throat.

'Thank you,' he says hoarsely, fingers tapping on the edges of the crystal.

Hannibal nods, and inclines his own glass in a silent toast to their mutual enjoyment. He takes a drink, holding the spirit in his mouth for a moment as he considers the other man.

'I hope, one day, you feel comfortable enough to tell me what happened tonight,' he says, but Will just hums, taking another drink instead of replying.

They keep a space between them, the silence building. Hannibal lets it, not uncomfortable but heavy with anticipation. Will crosses one arm, half-hugging the elbow of the other with the

hand holding his glass. He chews at his lower lip, his thoughts swirling like a tornado ripping up the roots of his confidence inside his mind.

Coby's attack really fucked him up. If he can't even touch his own neck in the presence of an Alpha, how is he ever going to let one touch him themselves?

Knocking back the rest of the whiskey, he sets the glass down on the round table beside him and clears his throat.

'I… er… I really need to go.'

'Very well,' Hannibal says, sensing Will's desperate need to flee. 'But I do want you to try the Gentling exercises before bed.' He reaches for the Omega, pauses and then lowers his hand. A calculated act of hesitation, and one that Will responds to by reaching for him and linking their fingers together.

You are still mine, Hannibal thinks, giving Will's hand a gentle, rewarding squeeze. They let go, and Hannibal shows him to the door.

'Have a good evening, Will.'

Will scrubs the back of his hair again – he wants to give his neck a squeeze to calm himself down but he *can't* – and pauses on the other side of the doorway. Looks back into Hannibal's burgundy eyes and hungry face.

'Thank you, Dr Lecter,' he whispers. 'I'll see you soon.'

***

'Come on!' Will calls, holding the porch door open as the dogs run outside for their last sniff and toileting before bed. The house is warm and bright, every lamp glowing golden against the blackness of the surrounding wilderness.

He hasn't had to sleep with the light on in years. He's still not sure he can turn any of them off.

Stepping out into the cool night air, he takes his time descending the steps. It's been three days since his session with Dr Lecter. Three days since Hannibal showed him the Gentling technique and shattered his mind with trauma. Will looks beyond the security lights in the tree out front, past the line of safety created by the glow of bulbs. To the looming trees, the empty space, the *nothing* beyond, and shivers.

I haven't been able to obey you, he thinks, and a part of him wants to cry. *No matter how much I want to.*

He'd made some calls. Checked in with old colleagues and confirmed that Samuel Coby is still incarcerated.

You can't get me here.

He shouldn't have left without explaining his past to Hannibal. It's likely damaged their relationship, maybe even irreparably. He should have known better than to try something that intimate with an Alpha. Every time… since that night…

Will lets out a long, slow sigh. Deceptively calm. Clenches his hands in his pockets. He doesn't want to see how much they're shaking.

Is he ever going to get past it?

Rolling his neck, hearing the tendons grind, he thinks back to Dr Lecter's request to practice Gentling massages on himself. He hasn't been able to touch himself since Hannibal's strong hands were around his throat; he doesn't *want* anyone else's hands around his throat…

His scar prickles and he reaches back over his shoulder where it starts. *I was so worried that Coby had bitten me… Bonded me…*

Sinking down on the bottom step, he hugs his knees to his chest and rests his chin on them.

He'll tell him. He'll tell Hannibal… And maybe they can salvage whatever it is they had…

What they have.

Family.

***

'Most of the time in sexual assaults, the bite mark has a livid spot at the center, a "suck bruise". In some cases, it does not.'

Will paces back and forth behind his desk, keeping distance between himself and the majority-Alpha students in his current lecture. The room is thick with their heavy, musky scent, and it clings to his skin like a bad aftershave. He wants to shower, to wash his clothing a dozen times and hide under his blankets in bed until his nose is clear of the smell.

'For some killers, especially Alphas, biting may be a fighting pattern as much as sexual behavior. Dates back to the old customs and traditions of The Hunt.'

'OK, class dismissed!' Crawford booms, striding into the room like a hulking, furious tornado. 'Everyone out.' There is a moment's hesitation as the students try to comprehend the sudden order, and Jack takes this as defiance. He turns on them with a hair-raising snarl, his eyes flashing crimson. 'What did I *just* say? Let's go!'

Will sighs at the callous way the Alpha has just undermined him in front of a dozen students. Drops his now-useless notes and frowns at Jack, who is resting back on his desk, his arms crossed and brow furrowed. Alana bought him a new can of Beta spray, and Will holds on tight to it as he is slammed with Jack's emotions. Fury, frustration… The thrill of the hunt… None of the old instincts ever go away, they are just channeled into more *civilized* outlets.

'You're making it difficult to provide an education, Jack,' he says.

‘We found a match to a set of prints we pulled from the Turner home,’ Jack replies. He doesn’t turn to look at Will, just glares at the backs of the retreating students. ‘They belong to a thirteen year old boy from Reston, Virginia. His name is Connor Frist.’

‘Another kid?’ Will asks, feeling sick.

‘Another *missing* kid,’ Jack says. ‘Vanished ten months ago, case was never solved.’

Will removes his glasses to pinch the bridge of his nose. Already, a tension headache is crawling up from his rigid shoulders. It’s as if his body is having an allergic reaction to Jack’s proximity. *Pure resentment*.

‘How many kids in the Frist family?’ he asks quietly. He already knows the answer, but he needs Jack to say it.

‘Three, just like the Turner family,’ Jack says. He stands up with a resigned sigh. Turns to face Will. ‘We’re ready to go when you are, and you’re ready to go now. So, let’s go.’

Please, Jack… Don’t do this to me… Not again. Will lets some of his exhaustion show on his face – he’s already pale and the bruises under his eyes are more pronounced than ever – but the Alpha doesn’t waver.

Will swallows.

‘You’re expecting another crime scene,’ he mutters. It isn’t a question. They both know what they’ll find. And Jack’s making him go, anyway. So Will just nods, because he doesn’t have a choice, and packs his things.

How long can I keep doing this?

***

The crime scene is a chilling parody of Christmas morning. Big tree. Brightly wrapped presents and wreathes of holly. Rotting corpses, leaking foul smelling liquid and bloated with decomposition. The burned body of a child curled in the fireplace.

There’s nothing to say, so Will doesn’t even try to speak. Just grits his teeth against the waves of sadness washing over him from the other officers, from Jack, and waits for the bodies to be zipped into black bags.

The journey back is silent. Will can barely breathe past the lump in his throat. As much as he’s sprayed himself, he can’t help but notice the way a couple of Alpha officers and Jack hover around him, asking if he’s okay, offering to fetch him drinks or snacks as they wait for the plane back to Quantico. Jack even drapes his coat over him to keep him warm on the flight, and Will lets him, too drained and too tender to put up a fight.

Now, under the harsh lights of the autopsy room, Will sits on a wheeled table and watches as Price and Zeller discuss the shots that killed Mrs. Frist.

‘So, who is our additional corpse in the fireplace?’ Jack asks, peeling back the sheet from the burned, shriveled little body.

Will swallows hard, tasting bile. He can feel the way his eyes are stinging; he loaded them with fresh eyedrops before joining them, but he’s not sure they’re working anymore. That, or his emotions are getting the better of it. Either way, he looks up at the ceiling to his how bright his eyes are.

‘I’d say *Connor Frist,*’ he says, his voice quivering. ‘He’d been prepped to shoot his mother, not watch her suffer.’

The pain in the room is knife-sharp, slicing at his lungs, his kidneys, even his *gums*.

‘Connor couldn’t put his panic back in the bottle,’ Jack says heavily. ‘So, he got shot, too.’

Will shakes his head. He’s going to be sick, but he *has* to say this. They *have* to know. He *needs* them to understand.

‘Whoever shot Connor…’ He clenches his teeth hard enough to hear them grind. ‘*Disowned* him.’

He slides off the table and ducks out of the room. Heads straight for the nearest bathroom and locks himself inside. His stomach is roiling, his heart beating out of rhythm and cold sweat dribbling down his spine.

Your mother didn’t want you. She was an Alpha; she didn’t want an Omega son. She disowned you.

His father’s voice, not even a memory, but knowledge gained through emotions and actions over the years. Will dry heaves into the basin, sweaty hands slipping on the edge of the bowl. Wipes his forehead, trying to think past the pain splitting his skull apart.

He can’t do this. He can’t do this anymore.

***

He’s been sitting in Dr Lecter’s waiting area for half an hour when the office door opens. Hannibal pulls up short, surprise turning to a small smile when Will jumps to his feet.

‘Good evening, Will. Please, come in.’

Will almost throws himself into the room, knocking past Hannibal’s shoulder in his haste to be inside. He needs the smell and the warmth of the Alpha. Needs to not *think* for a while.

He throws his satchel down on the couch and shrugs out of his jacket. He wants… He doesn’t know what he wants. A hug? A touch?

To be kissed?

Hannibal closes the door and looks down at the cream-and-gold-wrapped present that has slipped from the top of Will's ugly messenger bag.

'Has Christmas come early?' he asks, gesturing to the gift. 'Or late?'

Will frowns, embarrassed at being caught out by the overly perceptive Alpha.

'Was for Abigail,' he mutters, and Hannibal latches onto the admission.

'*Was?*'

Will paces to the desk, scrubbing both hands over his face. He's crackling with tension, shaking his head, trying to clear it. He can't think clearly. Can't stop his brain from whirring; stupid, useless thoughts like tires on ice.

'I thought better of it,' he growls. 'I wasn't thinking straight; I was upset when I bought it…' Huffs a sigh. 'Maybe I still am.'

'What is it?' Hannibal asks, a tingle of genuine curiosity warming his words.

'Magnifying glass. Fly fishing gear.'

Will picks up a dagger letter-opener from Hannibal's desk as he speaks. It's a beautiful thing, bronzed and worn with age. His hand is trembling and his dark shadow rumbles at the idea of holding a weapon, so he puts it back down on the book where he found it.

Hannibal narrows his eyes at Will's casual invasion of his belongings. On anyone else, that would warrant a dinner invitation, but on Will… For some reason, the casual ease with which he touches Hannibal's possessions, moves and occupies his space, pleases him.

He unbuttons his suit jacket so as not the crease the silk and takes his seat in his usual chair.

'Teaching her how to fish,' he says. Then, to goad a stronger reaction from Will, he adds, 'Her father taught her how to hunt.'

Will flinches at this. Turns his back on Hannibal, but bows his head in the pretense of studying the dagger again. In reality, he's testing himself by showing the back of his neck to the Alpha.

I can do this. I trust him. He won't hurt me.

Hannibal tilts his head to the side, enjoying the unobstructed view of Will's back and the curve of his buttocks. His clothing might be atrocious, but his beauty and elegance cannot be diminished even by thick cotton and plaid. Muscles ripple beneath the dingy checked shirt and he can smell Will's scent softening, growing sweeter as the Omega begins to relax around him again.

'Feeling paternal, Will?' he asks softly; gentler than he meant to. Not quite the barb he had intended.

Will scoffs and turns to frown down at him. Hannibal is always so *pristine*; so… *perfect*. A dark brown and black checked suit with a bronze tie; sky blue shirt and matching handkerchief… He looks sleek and sophisticated, and, in return, Will feels shabby and inferior, in every way.

'Aren't you?' he says, his words tinged with acid, but Hannibal merely shrugs.

'Yes,' the Alpha admits. As Will comes to stand over him, subconsciously drawing closer to his accepted means of support, Hannibal allows his eyes to drop, almost imperceptibly to Will's crotch. As much as he tries to hide himself behind ill-fitting trousers held up with cracked leather belts, he is an impressive specimen, and Hannibal allows the tip of his tongue to wet his lips at the thought of tasting him. When he raises his eyes again, he sees that Will's cheeks are a delightful pink as he blushes under the scrutiny. 'Our good friend, Dr Bloom,' he says, careful to keep the conversation flowing so as not to scare the skittish Omega too much, 'has advised against taking too personal an interest in Abigail's welfare.'

Will turns away again, pacing back and forth as his shadow rears its ugly head at the notion that Alana is interfering in his life. Telling him what he can and can't do.

He knows his anger is a defense mechanism. Displaced feelings for Coby and the New Orleans Homicide Division, masquerading as resentment for his oldest friend. Alana is a reminder of that time in his life; she's also the only good thing he kept from his time in the South.

He can feel how jerky and un-coordinated his movements are become, and the back of his neck feels hot even as sweat prickles his forehead.

Interesting, Hannibal thinks, observing each little change in Will's body. *Anger advances your Heat, but this stems from fear. Is this a continuation of what happened the other night?*

Perhaps he needs to poke the proverbial bear.

'Tell me, why are you so angry?' he asks, and the serene tone has the desired effect. Will wheels on him, his eyes blazing gold, teeth bared in a snarl as he swings his arms and drags his nails through his hair.

'I'm *angry* about those boys!' he cries, and it's enough of the truth that he clings to it like a lifeline, displacement or not. 'I'm *angry* because I *know*, even when I find them, I can't *help* them. I can't…' He shakes his head, sick with despise at the happy lives they chose to give up; lives he *wishes* he'd had. 'I can't give them back what they just… *gave away.'*

He throws his arm out, flinging the words at Hannibal from across the room. A muscle jumps in his jaw and he plants his feet wide, hands on his hips. He doesn't know what to do with himself.

'Family,' Hannibal says quietly, and the fire burns itself out of Will, leaving him sad and defeated, a broken shell of himself as he nods.

‘Yeah.’ He turns his back on Hannibal again; his eyes are stinging with what could be tears, but he can’t bring himself to cry in front of the other man. ‘We call them the “Lost Boys”.’ He huffs and shakes his head, leaning on the windowsill, watching the clouds descend on the city outside. It’s going to snow soon.

Even before Coby, he’d always struggled with the idea of having a mate, binding himself to an Alpha and settling down. Having children. Now…? He’s too broken. Damaged goods, not worth the effort.

Hannibal knows he should press his advantage, use Will’s anger and pain to open his mind, but there is something so achingly sad in the way the Omega has given up… Something too raw, too vulnerable.

If he presses now, he’ll shatter him. Instead, he needs to comfort him. Build his resilience for the challenges to come.

‘Abigail’s lost, too,’ he murmurs, distracting Will with thoughts of their daughter. ‘Perhaps it’s our responsibility, yours and mine, to help her find her way.’

We can be a family. You, me and Abigail. I accept you, Will. No matter what.

The thought pounds in Will’s head and he glances back at Hannibal. He wants to be close to the Alpha. Hannibal’s different to anyone he’s ever met. Maybe, this time…?

Will looks very young and vulnerable; blue eyes edged with gold, brown hair sticking to his sweaty neck and forehead, and Hannibal has to swallow thickly, tugging down his jacket as he rises from his chair. He can feel himself aching with desire, his scent thickening with arousal as he closes the distance between them.

You’re mine, Will.

Will holds very still, setting himself motionless despite the urge to flinch. He doesn’t want to recoil, and he manages to minimize the flinch when Hannibal places a reassuring hand on his shoulder. It’s a neutral, touch; far enough away from his nape to be considered platonic, but firm enough to ground him.

Will stiffens under Hannibal’s hand, sucking in a quivering breath, staring straight ahead as if afraid he’ll break the connection if he moves again. Hannibal smells sharp fear and then sweet, faint musk, Will’s past trauma slowly overridden by the hormones in his Heat-desperate body.

It’s okay. It’s not like New Orleans. Hannibal isn’t Coby. He’s not going to force me to do anything.

Will can feel the throb of his heart in his fingertips. Hannibal’s cologne, heavy and rich, caresses his nose, settling like sugar on his tongue so that he can taste it with the glands on the roof of his mouth. A whine builds in his chest but he swallows it down. He doesn’t want to ruin this moment. He’s been waiting all week for it. For another chance.

Hannibal squeezes Will's shoulder, very gently, testing the Omega's reaction. Will trembles but doesn't pull away; his knuckles are white where he's gripping tight to the windowsill. Shifting even closer, Hannibal allows his chest to brush Will's back, dipping his head to scent the air just above Will's hair. *Divine*. Cinnamon and chocolate; blood and earth.

Will wants to ask Hannibal to Gentle him; he wants to move, but his brain doesn't seem to be connected to his body. He can see himself in the dark window, his eyes glowing from an eerily pale face. Fragmented parts of a whole. Hannibal looms behind him, half-hidden in darkness, his eyes sparking red fire.

Please, he thinks, trying to make his expression relay his plea to Hannibal. *Please save me.*

'You don't have to say a thing,' Hannibal murmurs, sliding his left arm around Will's chest, cradling him close. A solid pressure, slow enough to be avoided, confident enough to support the trembling Omega. 'But if you want to tell me what happened to you, I'll listen. I won't judge.'

Will shudders, just once, and then releases his breath as he relaxes against Hannibal's body. He tilts his head back, his eyes sliding closed as he bares his throat to the Alpha. Hannibal's heart skips a beat at the *trust* being placed in his hands, the surrender of a man normally so defensive, so tightly wound.

I've barely begun working on you… You need this as much as I do.

'I was a Homicide Detective,' Will whispers, holding onto Hannibal's forearm with both hands, sinking into the embrace even as the locked secrets of his past come pouring from between numb lips. 'Working for the New Orleans Police Department. Hiding as Beta, like I do now.'

Hannibal keeps quiet, sensing Will gathering his resolve to continue.

'We were called in after the abduction and murder of an Omega,' Will says, rolling his head to the side, looking away, out towards the ladder leading up to the mezzanine library. 'She'd been taken by a rival Alpha… Her throat had been cut.'

'Like Abigail,' Hannibal adds, drawing another shudder from Will.

'I… er…' Will clings tight to Hannibal's arm, reaching up to draw the other one across his chest, forcing himself to submit to a full-body hold. 'I found the Alpha… Tracked him to an old railyard… But he… He had a knife… He…' He shivers again, his skin crawling, every nerve rebelling against the idea of being pinned as the stink of oil and concrete wafts up his nose. 'He st-stabbed me and…'

Hannibal loosens his grip and Will steps away, juddering and rubbing at the goosebumps on his arms.

'It's alright, Will,' he says, studying the frightened man carefully, holding still so as not to trigger the Omega's flight instinct. 'You don't have to tell me anything you don't want to.'

Will looks over at him, eyebrows creased, eyes bright gold and shimmering with unshed tears. He nods, gritting his teeth hard enough to hurt, and paces to release some of the tension crackling through him like a livewire.

‘He tried to bond me,’ he manages, forcing the words past the lump in his throat. ‘Tried to claim me.’

‘He bit you?’ Hannibal asks, his mind concocting a dozen ways in which he could torture and slowly kill the Alpha responsible. ‘Forced himself on you?’

Will shakes his head, two stilted, uneven movements.

‘No,’ he assures him. ‘No, he… He was interrupted before…’ His cheeks flush red. ‘Everyone in the department learned the truth. I lost my job…’ He scrubs the back of his curls, trying to rub away the shame staining his skull. ‘Alana was giving a lecture on behavioral psychology at the precinct when it came out… She… She became my friend. Helped me get my teaching job at the FBI. Helped me move on from what had happened.’

What had almost happened.

Hannibal considers Will for a moment, silently seething at the idea that another Alpha dared to touch *his* Omega. Will is special; of that, he has no doubt, and he rages at the thought that Will’s past trauma makes him resistant to physical touch.

‘Thank you for telling me,’ he finally says, remaining by the window when Will moves to stand by the chairs. ‘Admitting the truth of past events is often the first step to transforming that fear into power.’

Will looks up from under downturned brows, worrying at his lower lip.

‘What power do I have?’ he whispers, his voice quivering. ‘If the Alpha officers hadn’t shown up… Hadn’t dragged Coby off me when they did…’

Hannibal takes the chance and crosses the gap between them. He takes both of Will’s hands between his own, holding them up to his chest and pressing a kiss to white knuckles.

‘You’re more powerful than you know,’ he promises. ‘You survived him. You’re still surviving him.’

Will stares at him, his heart battering against his ribs. Hannibal offers him a small, crooked smile, making the corners of his burgundy eyes crease with affection.

‘You’re one of the strongest men I know,’ the Alpha adds, and Will’s eyes flood gold with pleasure at the compliment.

It’s why I chose you. Your darkness… Your strength… Your ability to understand me. You could be the one. The only one I could ever love.

Will swallows, his pulse fluttering and skin tingling. The fire behind them casts dancing shadows across the wall, warming him enough to make sweat tickle the back of his neck.

Dr Lecter understands him. Accepts him. Sees him for more than the events that have shaped him.

You see me, he thinks. *And I see you.*

He leans in, lips parting and eyes sliding closed as he meets Hannibal for a kiss. It's soft at first, deepening to something more sensual as their bodies press together. Hannibal's deep, Alphan purr rings out in the silence between them and he wraps his arms tight around Will's back again, hugging him impossibly close as Will molds himself against the other man.

Tongues meet. Slide and swallow, spit and scent mingling to create a new, harmonious taste. Their hands rove up and down spines, palms flat against rippling muscles. Hannibal is considerate of Will's emotional fragility, and lets the Omega set the pace. The younger man will succumb to instinct soon enough; for now, innocent kisses and the odd grope will suffice.

I'm more interested in your mind than your body.

'I couldn't Gentle myself,' Will gasps, breaking the kiss just enough to press the words into Hannibal's pink, swollen lips. 'I hate touching that part of my body.'

'Never be ashamed of your desires,' Hannibal replies, his thumb slipping up to skirt the edge of a rough scar beneath Will's plaid shirt. Curiosity piques – Will said he hadn't been bitten, but this feels like the scar of a crest being Cut – but he leaves the question for another day. 'Never be afraid of your own biology.'

Will huffs a bitter laugh and rests his forehead against Hannibal's shoulder.

'Easy for an Alpha to say,' he mutters, keeping his eyes lowered when Hannibal uses a hand under his chin to raise his head.

'You're so much stronger than you think you are,' the Alpha breathes, dipping his face to kiss Will's lips again. 'You can do anything you want.'

Except let you touch me, Will thinks, staring into the red-ringed irises. *Let you fuck me.*

Hannibal smiles again, as if catching the thought, and combs his fingers gently through Will's curls. He uses his grip to massage the back of his skull, melting away the tension, and Will mimics him by raising his own hands to slide through Hannibal's silky hair.

So soft, he thinks, tugging gently and feeling the strands slip like silk through his fingers. *I want to hold onto that while you move inside me. I just don't know if I can. If I can trust you enough for that.*

'I will always look after you, Will,' Hannibal promises, bringing their foreheads together until their share breath, drowning in each other's eyes. '*Always*.'

Will shivers, liquid heat pooling at the base of his spine and filling him with such a deep sense of contentment and *home* that he can't keep the purr from rattling up from deep inside his throat.

‘I trust you,’ he whispers, letting a little more of Hannibal’s light filter through the crack in his walls. ‘I barely know you… but I do.’

‘And I trust you,’ Hannibal says, soaking up the affection warming Will’s golden eyes. ‘I’ll do whatever it takes to protect you.’

Even if it’s from yourself.

Coquilles

Chapter Summary

Jack sends Will hunting after the Angel Maker, a killer who mutilates the bodies of his victims to give them the appearance of wings, thus creating guardian angels to watch over him as he sleeps.

Will begins suffering from episodes of sleepwalking as his body detoxes from the heat suppressants, though Hannibal leads him to believe it is a symptom of stress, using Will's growing anger at Jack to create a wedge between them.

Hannibal and Will grow closer, stirring up long-forgotten emotions in the Alpha.

Chapter Notes

Hey peeps! I've gone back and amended this chapter as well, again slowing down Will and Hannibal's physical relationship to focus on the emotional side of things. I think it's better now, hope any re-readers do, too! <3

Sorry this took so long to write and post - not only is it a BEAST of a chapter but I've had a uni assignment due this week so that had to take priority (at least for a night).

As always, I hope you enjoy. Comments and feedback is welcome. Hope there aren't too many typos!

FIVE

Coquilles

Will doesn’t know when, but at some point in the night, he starts walking towards Hannibal.

He’s trying to run but his legs are too heavy. He can barely trudge through the warm, thick water pressing against him. Only, he’s on a road, not in a river, so why are his legs wet? Why are his clothes soaked through?

He's too hot; his blood is boiling in his veins, melting his eyes. He can barely see; barely breathe. His ears are ringing.

The ebony stag keeps pace behind him. A whisper in the dark. A kiss on the back of his neck.

See?

Lights flicker in the distance. Will comes to a stop, frowning through the haze. Red and blue. That means something… He's just not sure what.

He sways and the stag nudges his hand, silky fur and strong nose, smelling of cedarwood and earth.

It's alright.

A siren blast announces the squad car, and Will flinches, raising a hand to shield his stinging eyes. What the…? Where…? He can't finish a thought. Doesn't know who… How did he…?

Two Beta officers, their scents sharp with worry, climb out of the car, flicking their torches into his face.

'Holy shit,' one of them mutters, pointing his light at the bright gold eyes staring out of a pale, pinched face. 'Is that… an *Omega?*'

'Are you lost?' the second officer asks, frowning at Will. 'Where's your Alpha?'

The words are muffled. The tide goes out in his head and Will blinks, looking around. He's on a road in the middle of nowhere. It's night. Sweat coats his skin, rapidly cooling in the freezing air, making him shiver.

'W-what?' he mutters, looking around. Where's Hannibal? Where's the stag?

'What's your name?' the officer asks. He's never seen an Omega before; do they always smell like cinnamon? He thinks of his wife, of the cinnamon waffles she makes on Sundays, and licks his lips. He's never thought of another man as attractive before, but there's something about this one, especially with the pink flush to his cheeks, and soft, kissable lips…

His name. The officer wants his name. Will nods. He can say that. He knows who he is… Doesn't he?

'Will Graham,' he mumbles. He looks around again. The trees loom over them, boxing him in. He's trapped here with the officers, but they're not going to hurt him… are they? They're Betas… They're not interested in him.

Where's Hannibal?

The first officer, the one who spotted Will's eyes, shifts uncomfortably, checking the empty stretch of road in case Will's Alpha is lurking nearby. The young man is sweaty and dressed only in a t-shirt and thin boxers – maybe they're in the middle of a mating chase? He's heard

about those on a training course. The Omega smells sweetly musky; it reminds him of his grandmother's cakes from his childhood, and he's very pretty. Delicate and fragile; he looks scared, like he needs a hug.

'Do you know where you are, Mr Graham?' the second officer asks, drawing Will's attention again. Flicks his eyes down Will's chest, to the muscles bunching in his abdomen, and feels a strange tug in his chest.

Will looks left to right, but there are no signs on this part of the road. He shakes his head.

'No.'

'Where do you live?'

Will frowns. His brain is so thick; he's burning hot but shivering from cold. His throat is sore and a headache pounds behind his forehead. He just wants to lie down.

'Wolf Trap, Virginia,' he croaks.

'We're in Wolf Trap, so that's good,' the second officer says. He offers the frightened Omega a reassuring smile. 'You're close to home.' He raises an eyebrow at the brown collie mongrel sat at the Omega's bare feet. 'Is that yours?'

You can see the stag?

Will turns, but the air beside his head is empty. Rakes his eyes down until he sees the latest addition to his family, and his heart skips a beat as his chest tightens at the sight of the dog.

'Oh, hi, Winston.' He reaches for him, but Winston ducks out of the way so that he can remain alert to protect Will. 'Hey…'

There's a sharp, stabbing pain in his feet. Will shifts, his calf muscles cramping, and winces. He feels raw and bruised; everything is too intense right now. Even the lights are too harsh.

'Can I sit down? My feet are sore.'

The officer lowers his torch to take in Will's goose-pimpled legs; his shaking makes his thigh muscles bunch up with breath-taking definition. He's like a living piece of art.

'Why don't we take you home?' he suggests, smiling when Will nods.

The first officer drapes a thick blanket around Will's shoulders as he sinks down onto the sticky backseat seat of the squad car. It smells of urine and anger; leaving a sour aftertaste on his tongue. Winston jumps up beside him and lies across Will's lap to keep him warm. His fur is soft, almost as silky as the stag's, and Will tangles his fingers in the thick tufts near his collar.

He's so tired. How did he end up here? He just wants to go home.

The second officer leans in near the window.

‘Who’s your Alpha?’ he asks again. ‘Are you on any drugs? Medication?’

‘Um, suppressants,’ Will mutters, frowning at the stitching of the chair in front of him. So delicate… Is he even awake? His eyes can’t keep up with his head; when he moves, the world lags behind. He’s aching inside and his thighs aren’t glistening with sweat, but slick.

Hannibal…

‘You been drinking?’ the officer asks.

‘No.’ Will sniffs; he can smell himself more strongly now; earthy and sweet. When he rolls his hips down against the padding, something catches and he bites his lip to stifle a whine. ‘Um, y-yes; not excessively. I had two fingers of whiskey before I went to bed.’

It’s the only way I can sleep when I’m alone.

‘Do you have a history of sleep walking, Mr Graham?’ the officers asks gently.

Will sniffs, and wipes the back of his hand across his forehead. He’s soaked; the warmth of Winston’s body and the blanket feels good, but his belly is an inferno and the wool is scratching his oversensitive skin. It feels like a razor being dragged over his neck.

‘M’not even sure I’m awake now,’ he mumbles, his eyelids drooping as another wave of fire rolls through him. He shudders, lips parting in a whimper as he clenches around nothing, grabbing for the blanket and the dog, certain he’s about to shatter into a dozen pieces.

The officer inhales sharply as the Omega’s scent thickens. He’s heard stories about Omegas in heat, about how good they smell and look, and the influence they have on Alphas; is that what this is? He never expected to be affected himself. He grips the door tightly, mesmerised by the way the Omega’s eyes turn from blue ringed with gold to pure, molten honey.

‘Come on,’ he says softly. ‘Let me call your Alpha for you. What’s their name?’

Will chews his lower lip, rolling his head back on the seat. He feels drunk; his head is swimming and things are slipping in and out of focus. All he wants is for Hannibal to hold him. For the blanket and his grating clothes to be off…

He can’t go back to an empty house. Can’t wait until morning. He swallows the lump forming in his throat and glances up at the officer.

‘Hannibal Lecter.’

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It takes Hannibal less than an hour to arrive. He pulls up beside the squad car and is already climbing out even as he cuts the engine. Will is sat on the porch steps, his dogs whining and pacing around his hunched, shivering form. He has a police blanket around his shoulders, though one sweaty arm is out in the cold air. Hannibal can see the steam rising from his flushed skin, and he takes a deep, slow breath to savour the Omega’s heat-rich scent.

It's starting; Will's detox is leading him into a prodromal phase, where he will wander and possibly hallucinate, all the while seeking the comfort of a trusted, familiar Alpha.

Hannibal.

Hiding his smirk behind a gentle smile, Hannibal crosses the yard and drops to a crouch in front of the distressed Omega. Will's head snaps up, his eyes glowing gold, and then his mouth opens in an 'oh' of relief. He all but throws himself at Hannibal, and the Alpha staggers as he stands up, hugging Will close and wrapping his coat around him as Will shrugs off the unwanted blanket.

'M'sorry,' Will mumbles, burying his nose into the soft cashmere of Hannibal's sweater. He's never seen the Alpha look so rough. Hannibal's hair is sleep-tousled and there are bruises beneath his eyes. As good as it is to be close to him, to feel Hannibal's firm chest and strong hands on his back, to smell his rich musk, Will can't help but feel guilty at waking him up in the middle of the night. The Alpha doesn't seem angry; Will can only sense a faint trace of concern and, something else… Amusement? He shakes his head; he's not thinking clearly.

Hannibal holds him close, nuzzling the top of Will's damp hair, pressing a gentle kiss to his throbbing temple before turning to address the hovering Beta officers.

'Thank you for escorting him home,' he says, squaring his shoulders as one of the officers takes a step closer. 'I'll stay with him, now. Is there anything else?' His tone makes it very clear there *isn't* anything else, and the second officer takes a final sniff of the cinnamon-sweet Omega, looking wistful at the way he folds his lithe body against the taller Alpha. Then he shakes his head, adjusting his belt and trousers because they feel a bit too tight.

'No… no… That'll be all. You, er, you have a good night, sir.'

Hannibal nods, watching carefully until the officers are back in their car and it has disappeared down the road, swallowed by the darkness.

Only when they are alone again does he take a step back from Will, placing both hands on his shoulders to hold the reluctant Omega away from him.

'Will; look at me,' he murmurs. 'How do you feel?'

Will glances up but he can't maintain eye contact. That's good; his instincts are driving him to be submissive and obedient. Hannibal nods to himself and shrugs out of his coat. He drapes it around Will, enfolding him in his scent, and Will purrs.

'Shall we?' Hannibal says, gesturing for them to go inside. Will hangs back, rubbing his cheek on the fine tweed, enjoying how gentle it is against his sensitive skin. Everything that Hannibal wears is silky smooth or soft; no grating cottons or itchy wool. He follows the Alpha into his house, the dogs at his heels, and tries to clear his head enough to thank him for coming.

'I… er…' His voice trails off when Hannibal turns towards him. The Alpha is so *tall*, and he has such a dominant energy that he fills the whole house. Will is suffocating; he can't focus,

can't do anything but trail dumbly after the Alpha as Hannibal leads the way.

'Sit,' Hannibal says, pointing at the bed. Will was clearly tossing and turning before he began to sleepwalk; the covers and sheets are tangled, half untucked from the mattress and his pillows are lying at odd angles as if he had cuddled up to one in the hopes of finding comfort.

Hannibal's voice cuts through the shimmering heat fog in his brain and Will obeys, adjusting the coat as cold shivers chase waves of heat up and down his spine. He's still sweating, and he tries to keep the collar away from his clammy neck. Wriggles his wet thighs against the sheets to dry himself off; he's already stained his bedding, and Hannibal might put him in his car and drive him to his house in Baltimore; he doesn't want to leave a mess in the Bentley.

After watching the Omega squirm in a vain attempt to remove the slick still leaking out of him, Hannibal turns his attention to the ordered drawers. He pulls out fresh boxers and a t-shirt, socks and a pair of Will's ugly, practical trousers. Adds a shirt and vest to the pile; knowing Will as he does, the Omega will want to cover himself with as many layers as possible once the first prodrome wears off. He will be embarrassed.

Moving quickly, Hannibal gathers together Will's toiletries, gritting his teeth when he includes the Beta pheromone spray, scent dulling shampoo – he didn't know Will had that – and little bottle of heat suppressants from his beside drawer. No matter; Will won't be hiding his true self from the world forever. Hannibal can be patient; the reward will be worth the wait. He slips the tablets into his trouser pocket; keeping them on him is an excuse for Will to ask for them. Perhaps even to beg.

'Time to go,' he says, lifting the overnight bag and extending his other hand to help Will up. The Omega's grip is burning hot and desperately tight, and Hannibal gives him a slightly stronger tug than is necessary, just so that he can steady Will as he stumbles.

Will clings to Hannibal, buffeted by the hormones crashing through him. He can barely find his feet, and whines softly when Hannibal lets him go to lock the door behind them. Hannibal hushes him, giving his shoulder a gentle squeeze, and then escorts him to his car, stowing a bag in the boot before slipping in behind the wheel.

Are you really here? Will thinks, blinking bleary eyes at the Alpha sitting beside him. Hannibal is so poised; so confident. He navigates the dark, empty roads with ease, speeding them through the night to the safety of his home. His territory.

Will sinks lower into the seat, spreading his legs as much as the foot-well allows. Whines again, rolling his head to the side in a feeble attempt to catch Hannibal's attention. He needs… He's not even sure, he just knows he's about to burst out of his skin. *Please, Hannibal. Touch me.*

'Easy, Will,' Hannibal murmurs, allowing his eyes to take in the offering before him. Will's cheeks are flushed pink and his chest heaves as he tries to display himself for Hannibal. He drives with one hand on the wheel and reaches over to squeeze the back of Will's neck. The effect is instant; Will freezes in place and then relaxes, his head dropping forwards and a low, grateful moan slipping past scalding lips. 'Rest,' Hannibal says, digging his thumb into the nerves designed to Gentle Will to the point of sleep. Under his clever fingers, Will's

breathing deepens into an even rhythm and Hannibal eases his head to rest on the window for the rest of the journey.

Will closes his eyes as soon as Hannibal touches his nape. He breathes slowly, savouring their mingled scents. Hears a vague instruction through the ringing in his ears and then he lets go, ebbing and flowing with the tide inside him.

He must have fallen asleep because he jerks back to reality when Hannibal scoops him up from the car. He struggles, earning himself a warning growl. The sound of it paralyses him and he whimpers, letting his head fall back to expose his throat.

Hannibal presses a kiss to his chin, accepting the apology, and allows Will to stand by himself, stepping back so that Will can adjust the coat around his shoulders. As satisfying as it would be to carry the Omega into his house, throw him down on the bed and devour him, Will is beginning to cool down, and he won't appreciate being treated so delicately. Not until Hannibal can wind him back up again, and burn away all thought from his mind.

Gesturing to the front door, Hannibal leads the way inside. He can hear Will's fluttering heartbeat and smell the first hint of fear as Will realises where he is. *I could have done anything to you, Will. You were utterly at my mercy.*

He reaches back, taking Will by the hand again, and guides him forwards, across the threshold and into the hallway. He doesn't allow for any further hesitation; apprehension is tolerable, adding a pleasant tang to Will's scent, but he must not doubt the safety that Hannibal presents.

Hannibal's hand is so strong and sure on his own. Will falters but then a yawn cracks his jaw as his eyes try to adjust to the dim light. He's still not sure he's fully awake; maybe he left his head on the pillow at home.

Everything in Hannibal's house is dark wood and lavish furnishings, lit by the soft glow of unobtrusive lamps. Will shrugs out of Hannibal's coat, teeth chattering as the sweat on his skin chills him to the bone. Hannibal hangs it with his scarf and begins to climb the stairs. He doesn't wait for Will, or say anything; it is clear that he expects Will to follow.

What else can he do?

Will takes a deep breath, bracing himself on the bannister, and follows. Hesitates when the Alpha looks to be leading him into the master bedroom.

'Um, Hannibal, I don't…'

Hannibal turns, feigning surprise. Will blushes an adorable shade of red and hangs his head, shifting from foot to foot with embarrassment. Hannibal leaves him to fidget for a moment and then smiles, backing away towards the room. His retreat should trigger Will's need to hunt, and it works like a charm. Will's head comes up, his eyes flash gold, so bright they're almost silver, and he bares his teeth. Comes after him and grabs for him as Hannibal drops the bag.

Hannibal's arms come up around his back again, crushing him close. Will claims the Alpha's mouth in a brutal kiss, sucking Hannibal's tongue into his mouth and growling when Hannibal doesn't fuck him with it immediately. The touch of the other man's skin on his strikes a match and his body fires up again, consuming him.

'Will,' Hannibal pants, adopting the frantic, worried tone of someone trying to slow it down, to reason with him. As though he didn't just trigger Will's chase instinct. 'Look at me.' He takes Will's face in both of his hands, staring deep into his eyes. 'Is this what you want?'

'Yesss,' Will hisses, clawing at Hannibal's sweater, trying to remember how to pull it up and over his head. He needs Hannibal's skin; needs his bare chest and abdomen, needs his lips and his hands and his teeth. He needs everything.

Hannibal smiles, and helps remove his sweater so that Will can litter his collarbone and chest with damp, open-mouthed kisses. He backs up until his knees hit the edge of the bed and then pretends to fall.

Will follows, straddling his lap, squeezing his waist with slick-damp thighs. He grabs at Hannibal's face, holding it between scorching palms, and claims his mouth in another punishing kiss. He can't breathe, can't think. He needs this. Needs Hannibal to be inside him, filling him, making him whole. He can't be alone anymore.

Hannibal peels Will's wet t-shirt from his feverish body, licking up the length of Will's throat, savouring his salty sweat. Will moans, rocking his hips as if he's already filled with Hannibal's knot, raking his back with his nails.

Growling at the sting of pain, Hannibal grabs Will up into his arms and stands. He turns, shoving Will down onto the mattress, crawling up to lie between his legs as Will spreads his knees for him. He settles heavily against Will's hardness, feeling Will's excitement soak through his thin boxers to create a damp patch on Hannibal's slacks.

Rearing up, Hannibal sits back on his heels and rips Will's underwear off, revealing a glistening Adonis laid bare before him. Will's eyes are pure gold and the flush of his cheeks spreads down to his creamy white chest, darkening the skin beneath the soft brown hair between his nipples. He is lean, his muscles sculpted and shining in the moonlight. He's hard, quivering and twitching as the cool air brushes over him. Hannibal can smell the sweet, sharp scent of his slick and his mouth waters. He wants to taste it.

Will is beyond words. All that slips past swollen lips are whimpers and moans. He pleads with Hannibal as best he can, drawing him in with an arched spine, spreading his legs and crossing his arms over his head in utter surrender. It is instinctive and pure and beautiful, and Hannibal has to work hard to crush the urge to mate with him now. This is about manipulation; not love.

'Sssh,' he soothes, dropping back down to cover Will's bare body with his own. His muscles ripple as he rocks his erection against Will's groin, and Will lowers his arms to stroke them reverently, planting kiss after kiss on Hannibal's lips, cheeks, jaw and shoulders.

Please, please. Will tries to pull Hannibal closer, tries to grab him by the hair but he's falling into the fire snatching his breath. Shaking hard enough to make his teeth chatter, it's all he can do to watch as Hannibal sits up again, steady hands undoing his slacks and pushing them down perfect thighs. He *wants* it. Hannibal is long and hard, begging to be swallowed.

'Roll over,' Hannibal growls, his voice ripping through Will's body like a knife. Will scrambles to obey, gasping as he grinds himself down into Hannibal's silky smooth sheets. Oh *God*… He could come just from that, and then Hannibal is over him again, his low growl sending ripples down Will's spine. Will sucks in a shaky breath, bending his knees to lift his ass up, presenting himself for mating. His neck is painfully hot and he can feel tears rolling down his cheeks. He needs Hannibal to bite him. To hold him. There's a remembered smell of concrete and oil, sending icy panic through his gut, but he buries his face into Hannibal's quilt, sucking up his scent to calm him, filling his mind with fog again. He's safe here.

At the tang of fear in Will's earthy scent, Hannibal pauses. He slides up Will's body, bracing himself on either side of Will's trembling head to kiss him, *so* gently, beneath the ear.

'Stay with me,' he whispers. Will nods, and Hannibal smiles into his neck. He pulls back, just a little, and then he rasps his tongue over the burgundy skin on the nape of Will's neck. Will cries out, bucking wildly, white-knuckled fists gripping tight to the covers as he comes hard, spilling himself across his stomach and Hannibal's quilt.

Hannibal gives a growling purr. He licks Will's neck again, sliding his hands over and around Will's wrists, squeezing tight and pinning him down. Will whimpers, rolling his forehead forwards to bare more of his nape for Hannibal to bite, dipping his spine and tucking his knees up as much as Hannibal's weight will allow, trying to encourage the Alpha to mount him.

'You're going to be mine, Will,' Hannibal breathes, speaking into Will's musky sweat. He can feel his eyes itching as they glow red. His jaws *ache* with the need to bite down, to sink into Will's velvet soft flesh and tear a scar that will ridge into a crest of ownership. He locks his teeth around the patch of blisteringly hot skin, riding Will's back as the Omega bucks and cries beneath him, his body wracked with wave after wave of pleasure.

Will shudders as he comes again, his insides clenching up and spiking pain because Hannibal isn't filling him. Isn't fucking him. Why isn't Hannibal fucking him? What's he waiting for? He tries to move his arms, tries to reach for the Alpha, but Hannibal's hands are trapping him, locking him in place.

'H-Ha-' He chokes off Hannibal's name as the other man growls. Squeezes his eyes tight shut, panting into the damp sheets under his mouth. It's exquisite torture – pleasure and pain and pleasure again, shattering him as Hannibal sucks a livid bruise without breaking the skin, lapping at his nape until his mind melts into the white pleasure blinding him. He can't stop coming, his body opening wider with every climax, pushing more and more slick out of him until it runs like tears down his thighs.

'Will you say it?' Hannibal murmurs, releasing Will's neck to speak directly into his ear. 'Tell me; who do you belong to, Will?'

Will whimpers, flexing his cramping fingers. He twists his head, staring back over his shoulder at the blurry, shadowed form behind him. He can't… He *can't*…

Hannibal bares his teeth at Will's hesitation, his eyes flashing red in the darkness. He rocks his hips down, rubbing his length between Will's buttocks, teasing his entrance, gathering up his slick but denying him the satisfaction of slipping inside. It would be so easy, but he has no intention of giving Will what he wants. What he needs. Not yet.

'Who do you belong to, Will?' he repeats, scraping his teeth so lightly over Will's tingling neck. He tastes sweet, and Hannibal swallows hard before moaning into an open-mouthed kiss across the mark he has left.

Will shudders again, huffing out a little sob as his body tries to come again. It *hurts* but it feels so good… He can't… He *can't*… *Please*... He doesn't know if he wants Hannibal to stop or keep going. He doesn't know if Hannibal *will* stop. He can't make him do anything.

Say it.

He bites his lip hard enough to taste blood. He shakes, flexing his legs and pushing his back up against Hannibal's chest, gasping as dribbles of sweat tickle his ribs and catch in his armpits.

'Y-You,' he whispers, a broken, pathetic little sound. *I belong to you*.

'*Good*,' Hannibal purrs, releasing Will's neck to kiss his spine. He lets go of Will's wrists and slides lower, licking a trail through the beads of moisture gathered in the small of Will's back, humming his pleasure at the sweet, spicy taste of him.

Will quivers, releasing a long, slow moan as Hannibal licks and kisses his way down his spine. Twists his head and rests his cheek on the warm covers, blinking heavy eyes as he tries to catch his breath. Hannibal *is* going to stop… isn't he? He won't go too low…

Resting his cheek on the twitching mound of Will's right buttock, Hannibal breathes in very deeply and deliberately. He allows Will to feel the curve of his lips as he smiles; he's pleased with how slick Will is, and how it smells. Minty sharp with innocence, sugar sweet and earthy musk… A blend that is uniquely Will and yet just one of several versions that Hannibal will come to know. He gives a rumbling purr and then nuzzles a little closer to Will's glistening crack, chuckling when Will whines and squirms, a half-hearted attempt to get away.

'Hannibal,' Will mumbles, his cheeks burning with embarrassment. He can't do *that*.

He doesn't have long before Will comes fully back to himself. Hannibal places one last, lingering kiss on Will's damp cheek and then slides back up his body. He lies to the side, turning Will so that the smaller man is facing away from him, wrapped in his arms with his back pressed against Hannibal's front. It is distracting; Will's body is still warm and open, begging to take him as deep inside as he can go, and Hannibal hasn't had a release. But it is part of the plan, and he can wait.

‘Hannibal,’ Will says again, his voice catching in a whimper as he bows his head to bare his suck-bruised neck to the Alpha. He trembles as Hannibal pulls him back against his length, but Hannibal simply holds him close, pulling the covers up and over their naked bodies. The sheets are soft and everything smells of Hannibal’s musky scent. The quilt is thick and heavy over his shoulders, but it is lined with silk and, for the first time in his life, Will finds himself enjoying the weight of it. He burrows his arm under the pillow, slipping into warm darkness with none of the usual fear. *I’m safe here.*

Hannibal hugs Will close, burying his nose in Will’s sweaty curls. The Omega is purring in his sleep, and Hannibal gives him one last kiss before turning his attention to the next part of his plan. When Will wakes, he will likely be confused, embarrassed and scared. Hannibal will need to get up early and create a welcoming environment for him; breakfast in bed, perhaps, offered with a chaste kiss and then a feigned awkwardness so that Will’s guilt can fill in the blanks and make it seem that *he* initiated the contact. Hannibal will pin the sleep-walking on stress; a result of Jack exposing him to an excessive amount of violence. He will also explain that returning to a steady, predictable routine of heat suppressants after too many for so long may cause Will to *think* he is experiencing prodromal symptoms, when, in fact, they are merely normal temperature fluctuations as his body adjusts to the recommended dosage again.

As Hannibal drifts into his dreamless sleep, he smiles one last time to himself. *You said you belong to me, Will. There’s no going back from that.*

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The morning, however, does not go according to plan. Hannibal wakes alone, Will’s faded scent suggesting that he had woken at least an hour before the Alpha. Pulling on fresh slacks and a clean shirt, he wraps himself in a dark blue robe to ward off the chill of the house, and then goes in search of his Omega.

He finds Will in the kitchen, showered and dressed, wearing his coat as if he has just arrived, or is just about to leave. His brown curls are fluffy, freshly washed, but when Hannibal tastes the air, he is disappointed to find that Will used his scent-deadening shampoo. At least he hasn’t sprayed himself with that obnoxious Beta spray and aftershave, yet.

Will jumps when Hannibal clears his throat, and moves away to put the counter between them. He fidgets, chewing at his lower lip and casting his stormy blue eyes everywhere except towards the Alpha. Hannibal squashes his instinctive growl and the urge to pin Will up against the refrigerator. There will be plenty of time for that. Instead, he goes to his espresso machine and sets about preparing them both a drink.

‘Although *I* may be, is it safe to assume you’re not sleepwalking now?’ he teases, smiling up at Will as he works the tap, filling the kitchen with the rich aroma of fresh coffee.

‘I’m sorry it’s so early,’ Will mumbles, closing his fist around the can of spray in his coat pocket. He shouldn’t have hesitated before walking out; he should be a mile down the road already. Or perhaps he should never have come in the first place. What *happened* last night? He can’t… He shouldn’t *be* here…

‘Never apologize for coming to me,’ Hannibal says, glancing up again to keep Will grounded in the kitchen and not on his worries. ‘Office hours are for patients. My kitchen is *always* open to friends.’

He finishes the coffee and then remembers that Omegas like sweet things, adding a heaped sugar to the cup before handing it to Will. The other man looks drawn and pale, his eyes bruised from exhaustion. He takes the cup but doesn’t drink yet; Hannibal smiles to himself when he realises Will is savouring the smell of it. *Good. You’re learning.*

‘Onset of sleepwalking in adulthood is less common than in children,’ he says. Will makes an unhappy little noise.

‘Felt like prodrome.'

The little sound of concern from Will tugs at Hannibal’s chest, but he distracts himself by fixing his own drink.

‘I’d argue good old-fashioned post-traumatic stress,’ he replies. ‘Jack Crawford has gotten your hands *very* dirty.’ He can’t keep his anger from sharpening his voice, and from the corner of his eye he sees Will flinch as the Omega picks up on his emotions.

‘Wasn’t *forced* back into the field,’ Will mumbles, and Hannibal wonders if he realises he is trying to keep two Alphas happy. Still defending Jack. *So loyal*.

‘I wouldn’t say forced.’ Hannibal speaks down to his hands, but he aims every word at Will’s heart. ‘Manipulated would be the word I’d choose.’ *I should know, Will. I’m doing it to you right now.*

Will takes a sip of coffee, holding it in his mouth a moment before swallowing. It’s really good; he’s never had anything like it, but he remembers the taste from Hannibal’s lips when he kissed him, so the Alpha must drink it a lot. That thought makes his belly squirm and his neck prickle with heat, and he shifts his weight again. Hannibal is so still, so calm… Will has a current of tension humming through him and it makes him nervous. He feels so chaotic compared to the Alpha.

‘I can handle it,’ he mutters.

‘Somewhere between denying horrible events and calling them out lies the truth of psychological trauma,’ Hannibal replies. Will huffs a bitter laugh.

‘So, I *can’t* handle it?’ he barks.

‘Your experience may have overwhelmed ordinary functions that give you a sense of control,’ Hannibal says, offering Will a tiny shrug. He locks eyes with him, warmed by the confident way the Omega meets his gaze. The duality of Will’s personality is intoxicating. Hannibal wants Will to stare at him every time he lifts his head and, at the same time, lower his eyes in submission, bare his throat and also attack, fight until his last breath.

Will frowns, his eyes flashing gold with anger. His heart trips over itself, setting up a faulty rhythm that batters his ribcage.

‘If my body is walking around without my permission, you’d say that’s a loss of control?’ he snarls.

Hannibal allows a smirk to curve his lips. Will is rattled; the idea of losing control of himself terrifies him, yet that is precisely what heat is – the utter abandonment of control, of higher brain function. Just another example of the Omega fighting his nature.

‘Wouldn’t you?’ he says quietly, and the knife cuts deep. Will flinches and looks away. The fire fades and he settles for taking another drink of coffee. Soothing himself with Hannibal’s taste. *That’s it, Will*. Hannibal savours his own coffee and then deepens the knife wound in Will’s psyche. ‘Sleepwalkers demonstrate a difficulty handling aggression.’ He leans closer, offering Will secrecy. ‘Are you experiencing difficulty with aggressive feelings?’ he asks coyly.

Will sighs. He looks away, his gaze unfocussed as he paces back and forth. Hannibal’s words have struck a chord, and it’s as if the Alpha is drawing poison from a wound he didn’t even know he had.

‘You said Jack sees me as fine china used for special guests…’ He shakes his head, his throat catching around a self-pitying whimper even as black tar oozes through his veins. When he meets Hannibal’s eyes, his irises are shimmering with gold again. ‘Beginning to feel more like an old *mug*.’

There’s your dark shadow, Hannibal thinks, looking away so as not to reveal his emotions. *Let’s aim it at Jack, shall we?*

‘You entered into a Devil’s Bargain with Jack Crawford,’ he says simply, drinking more coffee. ‘Takes a toll.’

‘Jack isn’t the devil,’ Will snaps, gulping the last of the coffee.

‘When it comes to how far he’s willing to push you to get what he wants, he’s certainly no saint,’ Hannibal replies, watching as Will takes this in, nodding to himself because he can’t deny the truth of it. There is a sadness to his face, a downward twist to his mouth.

Hannibal allows the silence to grow between them as he finishes his coffee. Will places the cup down on the marble counter. Puts his hands back into his pockets and then begins to pace again. Back and forth, three steps at a time. He smells nervous, and he keeps chewing his lower lip, sucking it between his teeth to gnaw at the soft flesh. Hannibal smiles at how adorable he is.

‘Do you want to talk about last night?’ he asks, shattering the quiet. Will winces, withdrawing his hands from his pockets and wiping his palms against his thighs. He scrubs at the stubble on his face, thumbs scratching over the short hair, and then wipes his eyes.

‘Er, yeah…’ He sighs. ‘I suppose we should.’

Hannibal waits, but Will doesn't seem to be able to say anything else. Just hangs his head and frowns at the floor.

'Will?' Hannibal asks, prompting Will to glance at him.

'What *happened*?' Will blurts, his chest tightening at how pathetic and desperate he sounds.

'What do you remember?' Hannibal counters, narrowing his eyes at Will, smiling when he sees the blush darken Will's cheeks.

'I, er, I remember going to bed… I was having a nightmare… And then…' Will sighs again. 'I'm not sure… Sleepwalking, I suppose… It's sort of a blur…' He locks eyes with Hannibal, setting his jaw in challenge. 'I remember waking up with you, in your bed. Naked.'

Hannibal quirks his eyebrow, his smile turning sly.

'Yes, you were *quite* insistent on removing your clothing,' he says lightly, chuckling when Will's blush deepens. The Omega seems to be frozen, limbs locked in place with embarrassment, and Hannibal continues to speak as he moves around the counter to close the distance between them. 'Your body is still adjusting to a regular dose of hormonal suppressants; after so long on too many, I imagine it must have felt as if you were slipping towards heat.'

'Yes,' Will whispers, ducking his head in shame at overreacting. Hannibal is so close to him now; he can smell their mingled scents on the Alpha's skin, even if he is wearing clean clothes. Hannibal must have changed to put him at ease. He doesn't know that nothing can put Will at ease right now.

Will's struggle is evident in the crease of his brow, the turn of his mouth and the pinched strain of his cheeks as he grinds his teeth. As different as the morning is turning out to be, the Omega is still open to his persuasion, and Hannibal presses his advantage. He moves fast, pushing Will back against the kitchen island, pinning him with his hips and claiming his mouth in a hungry kiss. Will tenses, shocked at the touch, but then he reaches for Hannibal's arms, grabbing fistfuls of silk and velvet to pull him closer. He spreads his legs, allowing Hannibal to settle one thigh between his, adding weight to his growing erection even as he opens his mouth to suck at Hannibal's tongue.

His Omega has quite an extraordinary mouth, Hannibal decides, cupping each side of Will's face to hold him, tenderly, as he claims his lips again. Hot and soft, begging to be spread wide as they wrap around him, his clever tongue working every inch of him as his throat tightens and then relaxes in anticipation of his seed… But Will needs him to be gentle this morning, after being so intimate last night. Hannibal knows there needs to be a period of affection for the sake of it, so as not to scare him. He will take control, and guide Will to feel secure in what happened between them without pushing it further. A tenuous balance, but one that he is confident he can maintain.

To prove his point, he pulls back from Will's lips and places a final kiss on the smaller man's forehead, withdrawing just enough to make Will's throat catch with a whimper.

‘Thank you for calling me,’ he murmurs, speaking into Will’s hot cheek as the Omega turns his face away.

Will hums, ducking his head to nuzzle at Hannibal’s collarbone. As much as the nape of his neck is tingling and he is aching and hard, he’s not sure he can bring himself to do more with the Alpha in the harsh light of day. He’s not sure what’s happening between them, but if he raises it, tries to put it into words, it feels as if it will shatter, and he doesn’t want that.

Hannibal smiles to himself as Will tucks himself against his chest, cuddling up as he seeks simple comfort from the Alpha. Will is progressing perfectly, and Hannibal rewards him with strong arms around his back, holding him close as he slips his hands beneath Will’s coat, stroking up and down his spine. He can feel Will trembling, but he remains silent, and they simply stand there, sharing warmth, savouring the feel of each other until it is time to go.

‘Thank you,’ Will mutters, averting his gaze when Hannibal pulls back. He sniffs and crosses his arms, barely resisting the urge to hug himself. He feels so cold and vulnerable without Hannibal holding him. It’s ridiculous; just another example of his weak biology.

‘The pleasure was mine,’ Hannibal replies, and Will blushes again, clearing his throat and shuffling his feet because he’s certain the Alpha *did* feel pleasure, but there was no seed on or in him to prove that Hannibal took advantage of him last night. In fact, he has a feeling that Hannibal made *him* come, though he’s not sure that wasn’t just another dream.

Hannibal reaches over and cups Will’s face one last time, stroking his cheek as he stares deep into his eyes, checking the thick band of gold hemming in the blue. He can feel a tug in his chest, making his heart clench around a beat; hunger and affection. A dangerous combination.

‘Remember to use your drops before you go,’ he says softly. ‘Your tablets are upstairs.’

Will nods, and swallows again. There is a moment, a hesitation, and then he grabs up the courage to lean up and kiss Hannibal’s mouth, closing his eyes and allowing a single, soft whine of pleasure escape his throat at the taste and feel of the other man.

Hannibal lifts his fingers to touch his tingling lips as Will ducks out of the kitchen. He watches him go, eyebrows drawing together into a curious frown.

Did you just take back some control from me, Will?

***

Jack collects him from the office and takes him to Trenton, New Jersey, where the Angel Maker has killed and mutilated two people.

Will braces himself when he steps out of the car; the local police officers and FBI agents are upset and angry by whatever’s inside. Their emotions batter him, and he keeps close to Jack, as though the bristling Alpha can somehow shield him from their maelstrom of fury. He’d found a sense of calm at Hannibal’s house, but that is all stripped away now that he is hundreds of miles from Baltimore.

‘Room was registered to John Smith, along with every other room here,’ Jack says, nodding to an officer as he moves aside for them.

Will can’t stop his derisive snort.

‘Appalling failure of imagination.’

‘They paid with cash,’ Jack continues. ‘No security cameras on the premises. The motel practically advertises it.’

I’ll bet, Will thinks dryly. *I wonder if Hannibal has ever visited such a place.* Horrified by the thought, he quickly asks if John Smith is one of the victims, surprised when Jack denies it. The victims are Mr and Mrs Anderson. He pauses when Jack touches his arm, his dark shadow rearing up at the contact. *Don’t touch me!*

‘I need you to prepare yourself,’ Jack says carefully.

Will barely resists the urge to roll his eyes. Jack’s feigned concern is irritating. After the child-killers, what could be worse?

‘I’m prepared.’

‘Prepare yourself some more,’ Jack snaps, eyes flashing red. ‘It’s soup in there.’

‘Soup is good for the soul,’ Will mutters. He doesn’t have the energy for this. For Jack. For his… *coddling*.

‘Not this soup,’ Jack insists. ‘No jurisdictional rivalry here. Local Police practically *begged* us to take it.’

Will nods, or thinks he does, but his mind is back in bed, with Hannibal. Although he fell asleep in the Alpha’s arms, warm and comfortable and *safe*, he got barely more than a couple of hours, and his head is fuzzy with exhaustion. He flinches when Jack snaps his fingers under his nose.

‘Hey! Where’s your head?’ Jack asks, scowling at the distracted Omega.

‘On my pillow,’ Will growls, feeling his darkness swarm up behind his eyes. Jack is always pushing him… One of these days, Will might just push back. ‘I didn’t sleep.’

It’s not a complete lie; he *didn’t* sleep, not much. He has no intention of admitting what happened last night, not to anyone. It’s not as if it will happen again, anyway, so it’s not relevant.

Jack gives a cynical smile at the idea Will’s reaction to the bodies in the motel room.

‘Got just the thing to wake you up.’

***

Toxicology takes a day to come back. Traces of medication from the Angel Maker's vomit indicates that he has a brain tumor. He's afraid of dying in his sleep, so he's making angels to watch over him, just in case.

Will pours himself another strong black coffee, allowing himself a single sugar to sweeten it before gulping the scalding liquid back. It's like battery acid compared to the rich, smooth roast that Hannibal gave him the other day, but he's not drinking it for enjoyment. He needs to stay alert; needs to solve the case.

He needs to stay awake, so that he can tire himself enough to sleep tonight. He tried going to bed alone last night, and watched the night fade, painfully slowly, into the grey light of dawn. His body is a mess of pain; his back is aching, his temples throb and there's a constant ringing in his ears.

After pacing his office for an hour, wearing a dent into the threadbare carpet in front of his desk, Will makes the decision that going to see Hannibal is *not* a personal matter; he needs advice about neurology, about brain tumours and how they affect thinking patterns.

When he climbs behind the wheel of his car, he realises he's trembling. Flushed with excitement. Then nerves slither through his belly and tie his guts into knots because he doesn't even know if Hannibal will *be* at the office. He grabs for his phone, dislodging the heat suppressants from his pocket as he pulls it free, and, without thinking, knocks one back with the cold dregs of his eighth coffee as he listens to the rings.

'Hello, Will.'

Hannibal's voice is warm and soothing; he always sounds pleased and mildly curious to be contacted by him. Will huffs out a tiny breath and rubs the back of his neck, careful to avoid the hot, tingling skin of his nape.

'Hello, Dr Lecter…' He blushes, fumbling over his inelegance. 'Um… Are you busy?'

'Just finished with a patient,' Hannibal confirms. 'Would you like to come over?'

'Er, yes… Yes, please,' Will says, his heart skipping a beat as he realises he sounds breathless. He swallows, ignoring the flutter in his belly. 'It's for a case.'

'Of course. I'll see you soon.'

He hangs up, leaving Will staring at the black screen. He frowns when he notices how gold his eyes are. How long have they been like that? Nobody else noticed, did they?

Squeezing a couple of Inhibitor drops into each eye, Will replaces his glasses and starts the car. Traffic is pretty light, and he stops to grab another drink on the way. Looking down the menu, he considers getting something for Hannibal, but it's a roadside coffee van and Hannibal has already said he's particular about what he puts in his body. For some reason, that thought makes Will blush, and he drops his change when he goes to hand it to the barista.

‘Sorry…’ he mumbles, grabbing to pick it up and all but throwing it at the indulgently smiling Beta, ducking his head and hurrying away before he can get any sympathetic ‘nervous little Omega’ noises from the other customers. He gives in to his craving and pours three sachets of sugar into the double shot before climbing back into the car to get to Hannibal. Why can’t he calm down?

Hannibal is waiting for at the door for him when he arrives. He smiles at Will, taking in the sheen of sweat on his forehead, the tang of agitation to his scent and the way his gold-tinged eyes dart around the office, seeking out the comfort of the familiar. *Perfect*.

‘Come in,’ he says, taking Will’s coat and hanging it beside his own. Will gives him a tiny smile and ducks inside, pacing back and forth as he explains the situation with the Angel Maker. Hannibal listens without interruption, and when Will is finished, he turns to ascend the ladder to the mezzanine library.

‘There’s no one-and-only spiritual centre of the brain,’ he says, searching for a particular book on neurology. ‘Any idea of God comes from many areas of the mind, working together in unison.’ Having found it, he tosses it down to Will, who is waiting patiently below.

Will flips through the pages, sighing and shaking his head because it’s still not sitting right with him.

‘Maybe I was wrong,’ he says. He grinds his teeth, squinting because he just can’t *think* through his headache. ‘How do you *profile* someone who has a tumor in their head, changing the way they think?’

Hannibal takes a second textbook from the shelves, spreading it open on the gallery railing so that he can keep an eye on Will whilst he reads.

‘A tumor can definitely affect brain function, even causing vivid hallucinations,’ he says, enjoying the advantage of an unobstructed view of his Omega. Will’s skin is cast gently aglow in the lamplight, and his jaw creates a sharp angle above the slim curve of his throat. He seems to have calmed now; Hannibal’s scent has soothed him, and Hannibal allows himself a small smile. ‘However,’ he continues, catching Will’s attention again, ‘what appears to be driving your Angel Maker to create heaven on Earth is a simple issue of mortality.’

Will snorts back down at the book.

‘Can’t beat God, become him?’

‘You said he was afraid,’ Hannibal reasons. That resonates with Will, and he pauses, glancing up at something unseen.

‘He feels abandoned,’ he says softly.

Your extraordinary empathy comes from your own sorrow and darkness, Will, Hannibal thinks. *Let yourself feel how helpless you are.*

‘Ever feel abandoned, Will?’ he asks, twisting the knife he dug deep last time they discussed Will’s mother.

Will gives a bitter, hollow laugh and turns away.

‘Abandonment requires *expectation*,’ he mutters. His words are cutting, and, for just a moment, Hannibal’s eyes itch red. *You expect nothing from me, Will?* However, this is another perfect opportunity to widen the gap between Will and Jack, one that Hannibal will not waste.

‘What were your expectations of Jack Crawford and the FBI?’ he asks lightly.

Will snaps the book shut and drops it onto Hannibal’s desk.

‘Jack hasn’t abandoned me.’

‘Not in any discernible way,’ Hannibal says, forsaking the pretence of reading to grip the railing and stare down at the Omega. Will’s scent is sharpening with anger now; how much of it is directed towards Hannibal? ‘Perhaps in the way gods abandon their creations.’ He narrows his eyes. ‘You say he hasn’t abandoned you, but at the same time you find yourself wandering around Wolf Trap in the middle of the night.’

Will tries to roll the tension from his shoulders. He doesn’t want to *talk* about Jack Crawford right now; he doesn’t want to talk about *anything* right now. His skin is stinging and the rough cotton of his blue check shirt is hurting him. He tries to adjust it where it is tucked into his belt, and scratches the back of his neck on the collar when he turns, fists in his pockets, to look up at Hannibal, his eyes flashing gold in challenge even as his mouth curves into a smile at how *possessive* Hannibal has become.

‘Well, this should be *interesting*,’ he snaps. ‘Please, Doctor, proceed.’

Hannibal restrains himself from sighing, barely.

‘Jack gave you his word he would protect your headspace,’ he says. ‘Yet he leaves you to your mental devices.’

Will frowns. Possessiveness and protectiveness aside, there’s something in Hannibal’s words that don’t sit comfortably with him. It reminds him of a previous partner, someone overly jealous of his time and affection…

‘Are you trying to *alienate* me from Jack Crawford?’ he asks, hating the way his voice wobbles at the idea of Hannibal manipulating him like that.

‘I’m trying to help you understand this Angel Maker you seek,’ Hannibal says, returning the book to the shelf. It is time to back down, to give Will space to breathe and rest and absorb his words.

‘Help me understand how to *catch* him,’ Will snaps. He can’t… He can’t have this conversation with Hannibal right now. Not when he already feels… conflicted.

‘If he were a classic paranoid schizophrenic, you might be able to influence him to become visible,’ Hannibal says, giving him what he needs.

‘Scare him out into the daylight?’ Will asks, leaning back against Hannibal’s desk to finish his lukewarm coffee.

Hannibal narrows his eyes at it; from the shaking in Will’s hands, it is hardly the first or even second of the day.

‘Might even get him to hurt himself, if he hasn’t already,’ he says, but Will shakes his head in frustration.

‘No… if he were self-destructive, he… he wouldn’t be so *careful*.’

‘Unless he’s being careful about being self-destructive,’ Hannibal suggests. ‘He’s making angels to pray over him when he sleeps.’

Will looks up at him. They lock eyes for a moment; red-ringed brown meeting blue-tinged gold.

‘Who prays over *us* when we sleep?’ Hannibal asks softly. He sees a shiver run down Will’s spine; is it fear or desire? Perhaps both. Adjusts his jacket and tie. ‘I’m sorry, Will; I don’t think I’ve been able to give you what you came here for.’

Will swallows the dryness in his throat, trying not to watch the way Hannibal’s suit trousers cling to his thighs as he climbs down the ladder. *You will,* he thinks. *Just not for the case.*

He stays very still as the Alpha approaches, his hands beside him, white-knuckled as he grips onto the desk. Hannibal’s scent is warm and smooth, and Will parts his lips to taste him on the roof of his mouth. Hannibal is aroused; Will is beginning to recognise the way the smell thickens just before Hannibal touches him, or kisses him.

‘You still look tired,’ Hannibal says, reaching out to stroke a brown curl from Will’s forehead. His movement excites the other man and Will’s breath quivers across his lips. His eyes darken, the pupils widening before shrinking under a wave of gold that spreads from the outer ring to consume the blue of his iris. ‘Is that why you’re drinking so much coffee?’

‘Can’t sleep,’ Will mutters. He can’t stop staring at Hannibal, but at the same time, he wants to lower his gaze, tilt his head and submit. The confusion is like an electric charge, locking him in place and making him shake as he fights invisible chains. ‘Not since…’ He bites his lip to silence himself.

‘Not since you called me,’ Hannibal finishes, and rewards Will with a smile. He moves his hand down to cup Will’s cheek, stroking his jawline with his thumb. He can feel the thundering pulse in Will’s throat, and the Omega’s skin warms beneath his fingers as desire rolls through him.

Will nods, hardly daring to swallow for fear of making Hannibal let go. He doesn’t want him to let go; doesn’t want him to stop touching him. In fact…

He takes a step closer, pressing the front of his body up against Hannibal’s lean chest and stomach, sliding a knee up between Hannibal’s thighs to rub at the growing hardness in the Alpha’s groin. He smiles when Hannibal’s breath falters, and he starts to draw his head back, arching his spine so that Hannibal will have to chase him if he wants to claim his mouth in a kiss.

A low rumble works its way up Hannibal’s throat and he strikes, grabbing the back of Will’s head with one hand and pinning his wrist to the desk with the other. He crushes their lips together, a bruising kiss of ownership, rewarded with a pleading whimper.

Will kisses back just as fiercely, licking at Hannibal’s teeth, coaxing him to tongue-fuck his mouth the way he likes. He slides his free hand around Hannibal’s waist, holding him close, fingers slipping on the silky wool of the suit jacket.

Hannibal growls and grips a fistful of Will’s hair. He pulls the Omega’s head back, forcing him to bare his throat, and claims his mouth over and over again. He wants to bite, to lock his teeth into the flesh over Will's raging pulse, but the Omega isn't ready for that.

Not yet.

‘Would you like to come home with me, Will?’ he asks, murmuring the words into thw other man's hot, flushed cheek.

Will’s belly flips at the idea and he’s nodding before he’s even processed what it could mean. He shoves up from the desk, taking Hannibal by surprise and breaking his grip. Wraps his arms around Hannibal’s neck and kisses him again, his chest vibrating with a growling purr as he sucks and bites at the Alpha’s lower lip, groaning at the taste of him; blood and wine and musk.

Hannibal allows Will to hug him close, draping his arms around Will’s slim waist and dipping his head so that he can deepen the kiss. He slides his hands up Will’s spine but is careful to stop short of the burning skin at the nape of Will’s neck. Lost to prodrome, Will's body is his to taste and own. In the light between shadows, he will lure the Omega to him with hesitancy and restraint.

Will moans, but as much as he wants Hannibal to touch him there, he knows he'll seize up. Freak out and ruin what they have.

Soon. He wants to be ready soon. But it'll take time.

Thinking of the time, he grimaces.

‘I, er... I have to sort the dogs,’ he says, rubbing the back of his neck in apology because he *really* doesn’t want to let Hannibal down, but the pack is waiting. ‘Could I… I mean… I could…’ He trails off because anything he is about to suggest would be rude. He’s either going to leave, after accepting an invitation, or presume he’s still welcome at Hannibal’s house after disappearing for an hour.

Hannibal, however, doesn't seem fazed by this news, taking it in his stride as he crosses the room to collect their coats.

'Of course,' he says. 'Shall I drive?'

Will can feel his eyes widen, and he can't help but give Hannibal a wide, genuine smile when the Alpha smiles back at his surprise.

At seeing Will's pleasure, so innocent and pure, at something as simple as offering to keep him company while he tends to his pets, Hannibal feels an uncomfortable twinge in his stomach. Something he hasn't felt in a very long time. He smiles back, though, and can't resist dropping a kiss to Will's forehead as they lock up and leave the office.

You could be my undoing, Will, he thinks. *I need to watch myself around you.*

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'Sorry about the mess,' Will says, shoving books off the armchair onto the coffee table so that Hannibal has somewhere to sit while he waits. 'I, er, wasn't expecting… Well…' He grins and shrugs. Hannibal grins back, because Will's smile is infectious. He steps aside as two of the larger dogs come running past, scattering snow from the fields outside as they race towards their feed bowls in the kitchen. Will has a need to nurture, to care for other creatures in lieu of offspring, and watching him interact with his pets is…

Comforting.

Hannibal frowns at his wandering thoughts. He moves to the bookshelf and studies Will's collection of psychology and criminal profiling textbooks, crammed together beside books on fishing and hunting. Narrowing his eyes, he extends a single finger to touch the tip of a photograph peeking from spine of a particularly worn book. *What do we have here, Will? Something sentimental?* He pulls it out, a quick look, and sees a faded image of a young woman, a baby in her arms.

Your mother, I presume.

He hears footsteps and slips the photograph back, replacing the book as Will comes back from the kitchen. The Omega pauses, drying his hands on a towel, and frowns when he sees Hannibal near the bookshelf. To ease his concern, Hannibal moves to the piano, opening another book to scan the contents. There is nothing to indicate that he found the photograph, and, from the corner of his eye, he sees Will's shoulders relax.

'Shall we go?' he asks, and Will nods quickly. His eyes are still heavily ringed with gold, and Hannibal can smell the first hints of slick in the air.

He wastes no time getting them back into the car, and places a hand on the Omega's knee during the drive back to his house, giving him an occasional smile whenever Will drags his gaze away from the dark skies to glance at him.

They don't speak much, preferring to listen to soft choir music spilling out from the Bentley's stereo, and, by the time they arrive, Will's nerves have resurfaced.

'I don't… er… I mean… Maybe we should…'

'You have nothing to fear from me, Will,' Hannibal promises, smiling at him as they listen to the cooling engine tick over. 'I enjoy spending time with you; however you want to spend it.'

Do you?

Will's eyes ask the question even as he presses his lips together and sighs through his nose. When Hannibal merely holds the gaze, he forces himself to swallow and nod. Hannibal releases him and they go inside, he leading the way and Will following with little hesitation.

'Are you hungry?' the Alpha asks, removing his suit jacket and rolling up his sleeves when they enter the kitchen.

'A little,' Will admits, still in his jacket as he paces the kitchen floor on the other side of the counter from Hannibal. 'Not really been in the mood for much food, lately.'

Hannibal keeps from frowning, despite his concern at the alarming news. An Omega approaching Heat should be ravenous; stockpiling calories to fuel the burning fever of their mating season and give strength to muscles for stamina and recovery.

Will is either lying to him, or his body has been on suppressants for so long that his biology has become confused.

Either way, Hannibal intends to feed him well ahead of the inevitable inferno.

'I'll make us a light supper,' he says, and fetches his chef's apron from the hook on the wall. 'Would you like to help?'

Will offers him a crooked, embarrassed smile, and finally shrugs out of his coat.

'I doubt my knife skills are as refined as yours, Doctor,' he warns, and Hannibal's blood sings at the sight of the Omega's slim fingers closing around the handle of a blade.

Will's dark shadow purrs its approval at the touch of cold steel against his flesh and he lifts golden eyes to the other man, catching a whiff of firewood and blood – Hannibal's arousal. His smile widens, warms, becoming more playful, and he saunters as close as he dares, teasingly knocking his hip against the Alpha's as he comes to stand beside him.

'Tell me what to do.'

***

The Angel Maker has struck again, this time in Cleveland, Ohio. Mounted his creation on scaffolding and illuminated the design with plastic sheeting webbed in blood.

Will can smell Jack's musk and aftershave coming up from behind, but he can't tear his eyes away from the corpse. The Alpha comes to a stop beside him and adopts the same position; looking heavenward.

'Why angels?' he asks.

Will drags himself from the warm current in his mind, from the golden glow heating him from the neck down, and shivers as the cold air hits his lungs again. Pain, anger and fear. Emotions from witnesses, surrounding officers and Jack cut into him, battering him until his bones ache with it.

'It isn't Biblical,' he says. 'His angels have wings. In sculpture and paintings, angels fly, but not in the Bible.'

'He's drawing from secular sources?' Jack asks, following him as Will turns away.

'… His mind has turned against him and there's no one there to help,' Will says, shrugging helplessly. He misses Hannibal; misses his Alpha's bed where they slept together last night, sharing space and heat and breath, but where he cannot lie tonight because he is three hundred miles away. He will have to try to sleep alone in a motel room tonight, surrounded by cheap sheets and rough blankets, assaulted by the harsh chemical smell of bleach designed to strip away previous scents.

'Er, *Jack*…' Zeller's voice wobbles and they both turn to see him approaching a bloody lump on the stained mattress beneath the angel.

Price looks horrified as Zeller picks up a pair of severed testicles.

'Are those… What are *those*?' he squawks. Zeller holds them up and grins.

'Someone got an orchiectomy cheap.'

Beverly shines her flashlight up towards the angel's crotch.

'Doesn't look like the victim's,' she says.

'The Angel Maker's?' Price asks, looking faint.

'He castrated *himself*?' Beverly grimaces.

'He's not just *making* angels; he's getting ready to *become* one,' Will says. At their frowns, he shrugs and explains, 'Angels don't have genitalia.'

'So, what; he was afraid of dying and now he's getting *used* to the idea?' Jack asks, glaring at Will as if this is all his fault. His anger is unwarranted for the case and Will can feel his darkness bubble up through his chest, snarling at him to tear into Jack, gut him, drain him, make him stop.

He's grasping at straws, trying desperately to stay grounded as the pounding of his heart becomes a pounding of pain lancing through his temples.

‘Could be he’s accepted it, or he’s bargaining,’ he guesses.

‘Some bargaining chips,’ Zeller jokes, holding up the evidence tub of testicles.

‘Does that mean he’s done making angels or just getting started?’ Jack demands. Will hangs his head, grinding his teeth and holding his breath so as not to taste the Alpha’s bitter, angry scent.

‘I don’t know.’

‘He’s not just killing when he gets sleepy,’ Jack persists. ‘How’s he choosing them?’

‘I don’t *know*,’ Will snaps. ‘Ask him.’

‘I’m asking *you*,’ Jack growls, and suddenly it’s too much for him. Will’s head snaps up, his eyes flash gold and he bares his teeth at the Alpha.

‘You’re the head of the Behavioural Science Unit, Jack. Why don’t you come up with your own answers if you don’t like mine?’

An icy silence falls over them, salty with fear. Zeller, Price and even Beverly duck their heads as Jack draws himself up to his full height, turning to bear down on Will, his eyes burning red as he growls at him.

‘I did *not* hear that! Did I?’ he snarls, and Will’s shoulders cave in. His vision blurs with tears and he swallows the painful lump in his throat, bowing his head and baring the nape of his neck. He only just manages to keep the placating whimper at bay until the other three scurry away, and then he lets it flow from his lips, removing his glasses to glance up and then away from Jack’s eyes as he cowers.

‘No… you didn’t,’ he mutters, tapping his glasses against his blue-latex palm and counting to three, squashing his dark shadow back down behind his hammering heart. Two warring instincts; fight and surrender. But he can’t fight Jack. He can’t. ‘I’m sorry.’

He slips past him to resume staring at the angel victim. Perhaps, if he concentrates hard enough, he can come up with the answers the Alpha needs. He can feel Jack’s eyes boring into his back, smell the faint whiff of concern because an Omega *never* stands up to an Alpha of Jack’s standing like that, and then he lets a single tear fall when he hears Jack’s footsteps fading away, leaving him alone with the corpse.

I wish you were here with me, Hannibal.

***

Will avoids Jack all the way back to Quantico, choosing a seat far away from him on the plane and riding with Zeller and Price back to the office. He hangs back until Jack has stormed off to his office before wandering down to the lab, and he’s been there ever since, skipping lunch because his stomach is a crawling nest of snakes and he can’t stand the idea of swallowing anything that isn’t Hannibal right now.

Beverly finds him standing over the first two victims, hands in his pockets, staring down at the ripped and mangled flesh of their backs but his gaze distant; unseeing.

'I've never heard anybody talk to Jack the way you talked to Jack,' she says, crossing her arms and leaning against the metal unit.

'I was out of line,' Will says, his voice still shaking at the memory of it.

'You were out of your *mind*,' Beverly says. 'My ears rang like the first time I heard my mom use the f-word.'

Will snorts a bitter chuckle and looks away. He hasn't taken his eye drops today and he isn't wearing his glasses; he can't afford to let Beverly see his eyes. See the gold.

'Are you OK?' Beverly asks softly, and he sighs. Misinterpreting it as frustration, she shrugs. 'I know it's a stupid question; considering that none of us could *possibly* be OK, doing what we do, but… are you OK?'

She knows… She knows there's something wrong with me…

Will glances down, away and then at her chin; the closest he can make himself get to her eyes.

'Do I seem different?' he asks quietly.

'You're a little different,' Beverly says, offering him a small smile. 'But you've *always* been a little different.' Her smile widens. 'Brilliant strategy. That way, no one ever knows if something's up with you.'

'How would I know if something was up with you?' Will asks.

'You wouldn't,' Beverly says, shrugging at her own oddness. 'But I would tell you, if you asked me. Return the favour?'

Will chews at his tongue and looks away. Price comes up to them and he backs away, shrinking against the cabinets again. They've identified the victims; all criminals. The Angel Maker is making angels out of demons.

'How does he know they're demons?' Price asks, his mouth twisting in confusion.

Will shakes his head.

'He doesn't have to know.' He offers them a tiny, knowing shrug when they frown. 'All he has to do is believe.'

***

'Ssh, *darlin'*… Sssh… Gonna bond ya… Gonna make ya mine…'

The voice echoes in his head, staining him even as he tries to wash the feel of Coby's hands from his skin. Will scrubs until his fingers bleed, watching as crimson liquid swirls down the drain. He wants to disappear with it…

He can still feel the Alpha's hot breath on the back of his neck. Still feel his hands on his nape, squeezing and manipulating the pressure points until his body was slick and welcoming. Even the *memory* of the touch has his insides twitching.

Will retches, hacking up bile before resting his pounding head against the cool shower tiles.

I can't do this, he thinks. *I can't. I have to make it stop…*

He's taken a beer into the bathroom with him. Will shoves the shower curtain back and gropes for it, his hot fingers making the bottle sweat. Gripping it tight, he brings it crashing down against the side of the bathtub, shattering glass everywhere. The piece left in his hand is jagged and sharp.

Perfect for slicing open flesh and veins.

Anglin the shaving mirror down, Will positions the shard over the nape of his neck, where a crest would be if Coby had managed to bite him. If the Alpha officer had bitten him…

Where *any* Alpha could bite him. Claim him. Own and destroy him.

Can't bond me if I'm too scarred, he thinks, and slams the glass down into his skin.

Will wakes with a jerk, drenched in sweat and breathless with fear.

Just a dream… A memory, years old.

The agony of cutting his nape is bad enough that it locks him in place, flat on his back in his damp bed. His heart is racing, his fingers tingling and ears ringing as aftershocks slam through him. Will forces his head to the side, staring at the glowing blue numbers of his clock.

11.35pm. He's only been asleep for an hour, after taking a long walk in the cold to tire himself out.

Fuck.

His fingers itch to touch the perfectly smooth skin on the back of his neck, to trail down until he reaches the rough scar beneath; the only trace of his attempted mutilation. Instead, he holds himself very still, staring up at the ceiling.

He won't give his fear the satisfaction of checking.

Seconds feel like hours. The night is endless. Vast and empty. He's alone, his skin scratched by cheap cotton underwear.

Vulnerable. Abandoned. Too broken to bond.

Will blinks away tears, pretending its sweat, and closes his eyes again. Hannibal says he's strong. He respects him. Protects him. Desires him.

I desire him, too. I need him… My Alpha.

2.02am. His head hurts and he's hot. *So* hot. Maybe he should take some more suppressants?

5.03am. He's burning up, his vision blurring as heat rolls through him.

I miss you, Hannibal.

Will imagines the Alpha beside him, a comforting hand on his chest, warm breath puffing into his ear as Hannibal sleeps beside him. It's working; he can feel himself drifting, slipping into the darkness where he doesn't have to *think* anymore…

Come and find me, Will. That's it. Come to me.

The dogs won't stop barking. Why are they barking?

Will blinks, frowning in the gray light of an overcast day. It's brighter than he expected; shouldn't the curtains be cutting some of the glare?

Why is he cold? He's shivering; a frosty breeze cuts through his thin boxers and t-shirt, raising goosebumps across his flesh.

Will comes back to himself, shock washing the last vestiges of sleep from his mind as he realizes he's on his porch roof. He stumbles back a step and the dogs whine, hanging their heads out of the bedroom window. They're worried about him.

He stares down at his bare and bruised feet, at his blue fingers and pale legs. Swallows the frightened whimper clawing at his throat and clenches his stiff hands into shaking fists.

What the hell is happening to me?

***

It's becoming a bad habit, but one he can't seem to break. As soon as he's showered the bitter sweat from his body and dressed in an old fishing jacket and jeans, Will drives over to Hannibal's office, waiting on the steps for him to arrive and then sitting in his usual chair while Hannibal sets up for the day.

Now, though, once the desperate need to be *near* the Alpha has subsided, Will can't sit still. He paces to the window and then to the ladder, back and forth as he taps his hands against the sides of his legs and explains what happened last night. The nightmare – parts of it, anyway – the insomnia, the sleepwalking…

He knocks back a couple of heat suppressants, dry swallowing them before remembering he's supposed to be on a schedule. His head is in a vice, though the headache has lessened somewhat now that he's near Hannibal.

‘Careful, Will,’ the Alpha warns, raising an eyebrow at the bottle of heat suppressants. ‘You don’t want me to take them off you, do you?’

‘Sorry,’ Will mutters, rubbing the back of his neck and pocketing the tablets.

Hannibal narrows his eyes, but he doesn’t want to start the day with an argument. Not when he has Will so desperate for him.

‘It’s difficult to lie still and fear going to sleep when it’s there to think about,’ he says. He prowls on the edge of Will’s vision, taking in his tight jaw and hunched shoulders. ‘You listen to your breathing in the dark and the tiny clicks of your blinking eyes.’

Will shivers and turns away. He can’t look at Hannibal right now; not when he feels so raw.

‘I dream more now than I used to,’ he admits.

I have more nightmares than before.

‘Your dreams were the one place you could be physically safe, relinquishing control,’ Hannibal says. ‘Not anymore.’

There is no control, Will. You will surrender to your Heat, to your nature, no matter how much you try to fight it.

Will wraps his arms around himself. He keeps a distance between them, though he knows he’s managed to choose a jacket with a low hem to show the back of his neck to Hannibal. It’s as if the Alpha is always in the back of his mind, influencing him.

‘I thought about zipping myself up into a sleeping bag before I go to sleep but…’ He huffs a dark laugh, and glances over at Hannibal. ‘It sounds like a poor man’s straitjacket.’

Or an Omegan brace.

Hannibal considers him, his expression turning hungry when Will looks away.

You wouldn’t wander from my side, sweet Will.

Aloud, he turns the conversation back to the case. Will needs a distraction.

‘Have you determined how this Angel Maker is choosing his victims?’ he asks, and Will sighs. The Omega rolls his shoulders, tendons grinding as the headache spikes across his forehead.

‘Er… well, he doesn’t see people how everyone else sees them. He can tell if you’re naughty or nice, or he, he *thinks* he can.’ He turns around, resuming his pacing on the other side of the chairs from Hannibal.

‘So, God has given this person insight into the souls of men,’ Hannibal says. Will snorts.

‘God didn’t give him insight; God gave him a *tumor*,’ he replies. His gaze wanders across the office, drawn to the black stag near the door. There’s something familiar about it; something striking… He can hear his own shadow whispering to it, hissing through his veins and filling him with purpose, with calm… ‘He’s just a man whose brain is playing tricks on him.’

‘You’re not unlike this killer,’ Hannibal says, watching the way Will comes to a stop before the statue. Does he recognize the toss of its head from Cassie Boyle’s tableau? Hannibal drew inspiration from the artwork when displaying her body.

‘My brain is playing tricks on me?’ Will asks, reaching out to gently trace the stag’s upturned head. It’s a beautiful thing, really… elegant and dangerous… just like Hannibal. Where did his own dark stag go? He misses it; misses the way it comforts him.

‘You want to feel such sweet and easy peace,’ Hannibal says, resuming his own stalking of Will. ‘The Angel Maker wants that same peace. He hopes to feel his way cautiously inside it and find it’s endless; all around him.’

My dark current, Will thinks. He lowers his hand, almost flinching from the stag, and shakes his head.

‘He’s gonna be disappointed.’

‘You accept the impossibility of such a feeling,’ Hannibal says. ‘Whereas the Angel Maker is still chasing it.’ He watches carefully as Will’s eyes flood with gold. The Omega flushes, and the low whine of need escaping his throat tugs at Hannibal’s gut. ‘If he got close to it, that’s where he will look for it again.’

Will blinks, coming back to himself. His eyes fade to blue and he swallows. Had he fallen asleep for a second?

‘I’ve tried to reconstruct his thinking; find his patterns,’ he mutters.

‘Instead, you find yourself in a behavior pattern you can’t break,’ Hannibal finishes. He waits a moment, then adds, ‘You realize you have a choice.’

‘What is it?’ Will asks, something sweetly vulnerable in the way that he trusts Hannibal’s advice.

‘Angel Maker will be destroyed by what’s happening inside his head,’ Hannibal says, drawing closer now that Will seems to have calmed. ‘You don’t have to be.’

Let yourself go into Heat, Will. Give yourself to me and this will all be over soon.

He dips his head towards Will’s neck, savoring the sweet musk of his scent, smiling when Will trembles. He allows a single, low purr to shiver down Will’s spine, tracking its progress and parting his lips to taste the resulting fear-tainted arousal.

‘Hannibal…’ Will whispers, keeping very still as the Alpha’s breath puffs over his neck. He waits, barely breathing, expecting a touch on his nape. Expecting the Alpha to push his advantage and pin him. Claim him.

I'm sorry … I can't… Not yet.

Hannibal could reach out and touch him, Gentle him with a hand or his lips, but he can smell Will's panic rising; taste the bitterness as the Omega fights the urge to turn and protect himself from the Alpha.

He steps away, giving the other man a little of the space he needs, wondering if the nightmares relate to the scar he knows runs across Will's shoulders.

What monsters lurk in your mind?

'I really *must* introduce you to a finer aftershave,' he teases, breaking the spell of tension. 'That smells like something with a ship on the bottle.'

Will chuckles and glances back at him, pathetically grateful for Hannibal's uncanny ability to give him exactly what he needs.

'I keep getting it for Christmas,' he confesses, and Hannibal nods. He can imagine that is true; a cheap aftershave, a simple gift picked out by an unimaginative Beta father with no interest in, or knowledge of, his son's *actual* preferences.

When was the last time your father came to see you? he thinks. For some reason, Will's loneliness makes him sad. He clears his throat.

'Have your headaches been worse recently? More frequent?'

'Yes, actually,' Will says, glancing at him, frowning at the look on Hannibal's face and ducking away. Is Hannibal… angry? Upset? He can't tell. Why? He can't know it's the only gift he receives from his father; the only time Bill Graham ever contacts him. It was the first and last bit of advice Will ever received from him, written on a note tucked into the packaging, to be discovered when he unwrapped it his first night at college.

Real men wear this. Perhaps, someday, it'll make a man out of you.

Hannibal allows him to move further away, taking a deep breath to calm himself, to repress the red itching to blaze in his eyes, and schools his features to neutrality again. If he ever meets Will's father, he might have to kill him for causing Will so much pain.

The headaches are the fault of the detox, but perhaps he can use them to teach Will a lesson about self-worth. Teach him to value himself as much as Hannibal values him.

'I'd change the aftershave,' he says. 'It doesn't suit you.'

***

The Angel Maker is a Beta called Elliot Buddish. Loving husband, father… Atheist, until the tumor began to press on the center of his brain.

His wife, another Beta, tells them everything, and then begs them to find him. To bring him home.

Will doesn't have the strength to tell her it's too late.

They find his body swinging in the barn of the farm where he grew up. Will stares at him, taking in the expression of peace on Buddish's face. He almost looks as if he could be sleeping, if he weren't strung up with his back ripped open like wings.

'This'll be the last one,' he says softly.

'It's Buddish?' Jack checks.

'He made himself into an angel,' Will says. He sighs. 'It wasn't God, it wasn't man. It was *his* choice to die.'

'His choice?'

'As much as he could make it,' Will says. He flinches when Jack steps closer. Holds his breath, trying to slow his pounding heart, and then releases it with a low whine, already trying to calm the Alpha before he says what he needs to say. 'I don't know how much longer I can be all that useful to you, Jack.'

'Really?' Jack snaps. 'You caught *three*. The last three we had, you caught. You caught three of them.'

'I didn't catch this one,' Will says, shaking his head, unable to tear his eyes away from Elliot's swinging body. 'Elliot Buddish… surrendered.'

'Y'know, I'm used to my *wife* not talking to me,' Jack growls. He turns away. 'I don't have to get used to *you* not talking to me, too.'

Will clenches his teeth. He doesn't *want* to explain to Jack – to bare his soul for the Alpha when he knows, he *knows* it'll be used against him. But Jack's forcing his hand, just like always. And by walking away, by rejecting Will, he's manipulating him into giving in. A cheap trick.

'It's getting harder and harder to make myself look,' he says, hating the way his voice cracks with desperation. Jack turns to frown at him.

'No-one's asking you to look alone.'

'But I *am* looking alone,' Will says, his throat catching around another whimper. He creases his brow, trying to hold back tears of frustration, *loathing* his pathetic he must look and sound. 'And you *know* what looking at this does.'

'I know what happens if you *don't* look,' Jack says grimly. 'And so do you.'

'I can make myself look,' Will says, frustrated because Jack doesn't *understand*. 'But the thinking is *shutting* down.' He shakes his head and looks at the floor. Giving up. *I can't… Please don't make me anymore…*

Jack chews his lip for a moment. Glances up at Buddish, then back at Will.

‘What is it about this one?’ he asks softly. Will shakes his head again.

‘It isn’t this one; it’s *all* of them,’ he snaps. ‘It’s the next one, it’s the one that I *know* is coming after *that*…’

‘You wanna go back to your lecture hall? Read about this stuff on TattleCrime.com?’

Jack’s words are like a kick in the gut, and they fill him with shame. Will can *feel* how disappointed the Alpha is. He’s letting him down. He’s not strong enough.

‘No, I *don’t*, but that may be what I have to do,’ he says, closing his eyes against the pain of it all. ‘This is *bad* for me.’

It’s as close as he can get to begging Jack to let him stop. His eyes are golden; he can feel them pulsing, and he’s shaking with the need for comfort now. But Jack regards him with cold indifference, as if he’s *bored* by Will’s theatrics.

‘I’m not your father, Will,’ he says. ‘And I’m not your Alpha. Not gonna tell you what you ought to do.’

Will swallows hard, fighting down the hurricane of emotions tearing apart his insides.

‘Seems like that’s *exactly* what you’re going to do,’ he says quietly.

Jack sighs, and comes closer again. Always persistent.

‘You go back to your classroom, when there’s killing going on that *you* could have prevented, it will sour your classroom forever.’

‘Maybe,’ Will whispers. ‘And then maybe I find a job as a diesel mechanic in a boatyard.’

Please don’t break me, Jack. I’m not yours to break.

Jack’s eyes flicker red. He sets his jaw, accepting the challenge that he sees in Will’s pale face and golden eyes.

‘You wanna quit?’ He leans closer and smiles at him. ‘Quit.’

Without waiting for an answer, he turns and strides from the barn, leaving Will alone to consider his loyalty.

***

So much pain. Raw and deep.

Will pauses in the corridor outside Jack’s office, scenting the air for the Alpha’s distress.

Something’s really, *really* wrong. Is it Jack’s mate? Is that why he’s been so angry this past week?

Will braces himself and then pushes open the glass door to the office. Jack's scent fills his nose, sharp and bitter with suffering. He smells salty, like the tears he refuses to shed.

'What do you want, Will?' Jack asks heavily. He sounds tired; too tired to fight. A wounded beast, he has been defeated by whatever news he's received.

Will sinks into the chair beside him. His presence as an Omega, his scent and the tiny whines he can make, they will all soothe Jack. Help him deal with his grief.

'I'm gonna sit here until you're ready to talk,' he says softly. 'You don't have to say a word until you're ready, but... I'm not going anywhere until you do.'

He listens to Jack's breathing, to the tick of the clock in the stifling silence of the room, and he waits.

I'm not going anywhere, Jack.

Entrée

Chapter Summary

A nurse at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane is brutally murdered by a patient, Dr. Abel Gideon, in a manner reminiscent of the Chesapeake Ripper, who hasn't committed a murder in two years, the same number of years Gideon has been incarcerated. Jack sends Will to investigate, whilst receiving mysterious calls from Miriam Lass, another ‘gifted Omega’ that he exploited when investigating the Ripper murders; an Omega who has been missing for two years. Struggling with the emotional burden of Jack’s guilt, Will turns to the only Alpha he can trust to help him; Hannibal.

Chapter Notes

*** AMENDED twice. This is now the chapter in which Hannibal and Will have sex for the first time. ***

Yay, this chapter is finally finished!!! I hope you enjoy reading as much as I enjoyed writing it! And now I need to go and cuddle up in a corner because of the overwhelming feels.

SIX

Entrée

‘I’d like to take you to the opera, sometime.’

At the sound of Hannibal’s voice, Will looks up. He’s hunched over his fishing flies, hard at work constructing elk-hair caddis lures for the influx of trout feeding on late-hatching pupae downriver from his house.

Hannibal sits in the mustard-yellow armchair, legs crossed at the knee, reading one of Will’s books on forensic psychology with the space-heater beside him and a pack of dogs sleeping all around him.

A perfect family.

The domesticity of the moment makes Will’s gut clench and he swallows back a purr.

‘The opera?’ he asks, blinking to refocus after so long concentrating on minute details. ‘Why?’

‘To share something for which I have a passion,’ Hannibal says, marking his place in the book and setting it aside. ‘My father took me to see La Bohème when I was a young boy. That memory has stayed with me ever since; as has my love for music.’ He tilts his head, considering the quiet, introverted Omega across the room from him. ‘Did your father take you anywhere special when you were a child, Will?’

Will snorts his dark, bitter laugh. They’ve had such a great weekend up until now. Does he want to ruin it with memories of his Dad’s disappointment?

‘You mean besides boat sales and fishing lakes?’ he asks. ‘No.’

His gaze grows distant as he remembers the night his father took a friend’s son to a football game, leaving him in their trailer because it wasn’t “appropriate” to take a newly-presented Omega to a stadium packed with potential Alphas. “Pretty little Will” had had so much potential, but the moment he presented as a lesser caste, his relationship with Bill Graham changed forever.

Pity you’ll never be a real man.

Hannibal’s brow creases at the sad look on Will’s face. He hadn’t meant to upset him. He, too, had been enjoying a relaxing weekend, secure and comfortable in each other’s company. Will had been progressing nicely; no longer flinching at touches near his nape, growing bolder in asking for hands to cup and squeeze his buttocks, even if the teasing touches went nowhere beyond kisses.

The Omega had slipped into prodrome once again, climbing on top of Hannibal in the night and whimpering to be mounted. Hannibal had touched Will, kissed and cradled him, sucked and nibbled at his nape and made him come hard enough to shake the bed, but he continued to resist the urge to penetrate him.

Be it teeth or penis, he wants Will’s cogent consent for such an intimate act, no matter how long it takes for him to be ready.

‘I have tickets for a show in two weeks’ time,’ Hannibal says, making a show of returning to the book so as not to pressure Will into discussing whatever memory made him melancholy. ‘In aid of Hunger Relief.’

Will considers the request. As flattered as he is at the offer – his belly squirms at the thought of stepping out on Hannibal’s arm – the same visualization makes him cringe and sweat with nerves. What if someone from work sees him? What if they realize what he is? And what would he ever have to say to Hannibal’s friends?

Their differences have never felt so obvious before.

‘Think about it,’ Hannibal says, before Will can surrender to his social fear and retreat into isolation. ‘You don’t have to answer right away.’

***

Jack's phone call to Will's cell ruins their Sunday.

A nurse has been killed at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, in a manner chillingly like the Chesapeake Ripper. He's coming to collect Will now, to take him through the crime scene.

Will sighs; it's time for Hannibal to go home.

When returns from the dining room, he finds Hannibal standing beside the couch, staring at him with a peculiar expression on his face.

Concern? Confusion? Will can't tell. When he frowns at him, Hannibal merely schools his features to neutrality and takes his hand, giving it a comforting squeeze.

'I'll be there, if you need me,' the Alpha says, and the unspoken agreement that Will can go back to the field, can still help Jack and the FBI, that Hannibal believes he *is* strong enough to do what needs to be done, is like a drop of liquid courage in Will's stomach. He nods, lacing his fingers with Hannibal's, and draws him in for a lingering kiss.

'Thank you,' he whispers, resting his forehead against Hannibal's chest, appreciating the feel of soft cashmere against his skin. They both know he won't call for Hannibal whilst at the scene. Their time together is private.

He's not ready to tell Jack or Alana that something's going on between them.

Hannibal waits for Will to pull away, hiding a smirk at the Omega's reluctance, and lingers at the porch door as he pulls on his coat.

'Take care of yourself,' he says, winding his scarf about his throat. 'I'll see you soon.'

Will nods, swallowing the lump choking him. He holds the door open and watches, loneliness making him sick, as Hannibal's car turns a corner at the end of the drive and disappears from sight, leaving him in the too-big, too-exposed wilderness of Wolf Trap.

I want you, he thinks, moving to sit in Hannibal's spot on the couch and scenting the old fabric still clinging to the Alpha's scent. *Whatever it takes; I'm yours.*

***

Jack and Will arrive at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane exactly two hours later.

The Alpha pulls up behind an expensive convertible, braking sharply and jolting him as Will adds two extra Inhibitor drops to his eyes.

Will bites back a growl and settles for frowning as he slips his glasses on. He doesn't need the glasses, anymore; Hannibal's new solution is kinder to his eyes than his old off-the-shelf

variety, but any barrier between his empathy and the world is a welcome shield, especially in a place like this.

Madness clings to you like gossamer strands.

'Well, thanks to Freddie Lounds,' Jack says, 'there's an unconfirmed story floating out there that the Chesapeake Ripper is already in custody.'

'Unconfirmed…? Am I confirming?' Will demands, and he does nothing to keep the disdain from his voice at the idea of doing *anything* for Freddie Lounds. 'Fact-checking for Freddie Lounds… Eugh.'

'No, you're fact-checking for me,' Jack replies, leading the way up the steps to the hospital. Will hesitates before following, his heart skipping a beat and his stomach clenching with dread.

'Always feel a little nervous entering these places,' he mutters, hanging back for as long as possible.

'Why's that?' Jack asks, unfazed by the Omega's fear. Will offers a half-hearted shrug, trying to keep the wobble from his voice as he confesses one of his deepest fears.

'Afraid they won't let me out.'

'Don't worry,' Jack says, throwing him a small smile over his shoulder. 'I won't leave you here.'

Will rolls his eyes.

'Yeah, not today.'

They sign in, receiving laminate visitor's passes, and Jack hands over his firearm. An officer escorts them to Dr Chilton's office, a lavish room filled with expensive furniture and what is designed to be an impressive array of books. Looking round when he enters, Will can't help but notice that many spaces on the shelves are filled with ornaments or framed awards for Dr Chilton; there are less than half as many books here as Hannibal has in his office. Since spending more time in his home, Will has come to appreciate just how much his Alpha reads; Hannibal's personal library is twice the size of his one at work, filled from floor to ceiling with all manner of books and scripts.

'Dr Bloom just called me about you, Mr Graham,' Dr Frederick Chilton says, extending his hand to shake with Will first. 'Or, should I call you *Dr* Graham?' He fixes dark, hungry eyes on Will's face, drinking in his fine features, soft lips and stormy blue eyes.

Not an Omega… Unless he has specialist Inhibitor drops and medical-grade scent suppressants.

'I'm not a doctor,' Will mutters, releasing the Alpha's hand as quickly as possible and then hiding shaking fists in his trouser pockets.

Don't touch me. I don't belong to you.

He still has Hannibal's scent on him, evidence of long hugs and lazy kisses, and the foreign Alpha scent sets his teeth on edge.

'You're not FBI, either,' Chilton says, nodding to the badge at Will's belt. 'That's a temporary identification.'

A low whine tries to escape Will's mouth and he shrinks under the scrutiny. Jack straightens his shoulders, filling more of the space to protect him, and reaches to shake with Frederick.

'Mr Graham *teaches* at the Academy,' he says, tilting the other Alpha's wrist just slightly to prove his dominance in the situation. Chilton's eyes widen slightly and then narrow, but he doesn't fight it. Instead, he gives Will an indulgent smile.

'Ah, a *teacher*,' he says, and Will wonders if he knows the truth. He certainly suspects, which explains the smug, hungry emotions battering him.

Dr Chilton extends his arms to the leather chairs facing his desk.

'Please, gentlemen; take a seat.'

'Thank you,' Jack says, leading the way. Will follows, half a step behind, his skin crawling. He really *hates* psychiatrists. Well, *most* psychiatrists…

Once everyone is settled, Jack gets straight to business.

'Dr Chilton, we're going to need to see the crime scene while it's still… relatively undisturbed.'

'I assure you, for something so disturbing it is quite *undisturbed*,' Chilton says, adjusting his suit jacket.

Without looking at the Alpha, Will asks the question that has been burning his tongue since they arrived.

'Why was a nurse left *alone* with a prisoner in a high-security psychiatric hospital?'

Dr Chilton paints a look of utmost sorrow on his face, though the perfectly groomed beard and waxed eyebrows diminish it somewhat. That, and the layers of insincerity in his scent.

'For the two years since he was brought here, Gideon behaved *perfectly*,' he says. 'And gave every appearance at co-operating with attempts at therapy. As dictated by our current administrator, security around him was slightly… relaxed.' He fails to mention that *he* is the current administrator. He sits forwards, locking eyes with Will, trying to see through his tinted lenses, checking for gold, before moving to Jack's gaze. 'I cannot help feeling responsible myself for what happened.' He points at the chair where Will is sitting now. 'He sat directly across from me and I had *no idea* what he was hiding. And now one of our staff is *dead*.'

Will suppresses a sigh at the display, but Jack seems to buy it, at least somewhat.

‘I understand, Doctor,’ he says gravely. ‘Mr Graham’s going to need to see the crime scene with as much privacy as you can provide.’

Jack… stop… Will glances at Chilton again, then lowers his eyes when the Alpha smirks.

‘Oh, yes, that *thing* that you do,’ he says, huffing out a purring laugh that catches Will’s attention enough that he can’t help but look into his face. Chilton’s eyes flicker red and he locks onto Will with piercing ferocity. ‘You’re quite the topic of conversation in certain psychiatric circles, Mr Graham.’

‘Am I?’ Will asks, feigning indifference in a desperate attempt to hide his growing alarm. Chilton smiles.

‘Oh, yes. A Beta with an unusually *Omegan* cocktail of empathy, personality disorders and neuroses that make you a highly skilled profiler.’

Shit… Jack… He does know.

Will swallows hard enough to hear it catch in his throat, and there’s a quiet growl from the Alpha beside him.

‘He’s not a profiler,’ Jack says, levelling Chilton with his glare. ‘And, even if he *were*, *he’s* not here to be analyzed.’

Dr Chilton raises his eyebrows, still baring his teeth at Will in a hungry smile.

‘Perhaps he should be.’ He winks at Jack and then resumes speaking to Will. ‘We are *woefully* short of material on your sort of “thing”, Mr Graham.’ He stands up and prowls closer. ‘Would you speak to some of the staff?’

‘Doctor,’ Jack warns.

‘No, no, no, not this trip,’ Chilton says, soothing him the way one might soothe a grumpy child. He comes to a stop right in front of Will, his sharp, musky scent and expensive cologne washing over him. ‘Maybe a special visit.’

Will’s dark shadow snarls behind his ribs even as fear snatches his breath and he starts to shake. He has to get out of here *now*.

‘Thank you, Dr Chilton,’ he manages, forcing himself up from the chair because his life, his sanity, depends on it. ‘I’d like to see the crime scene now.’

Chilton smiles when Will looks down and meets his eye; the Omega is taller than him, a rarity for their breed, and Will can’t help but tremble at the idea of being trapped with this man. What he would do to him…

But Chilton merely steps back and shows them to the hospital room. He watches closely when Will follows Jack inside, and takes a slow, deep breath to taste the Omega’s fear and…

something else… when he sees the mutilated nurse.

Will can hear a purr rumbling in Chilton's throat as he waits in the doorway, as though he's *proud* of what Will is about to do. He has to fight down bile, and squash the urge to attack him.

I'm not yours, you smug fuck, he thinks. *I'm not anyone's… yet.*

Blocking out the sound, Will closes his eyes as the room sings to him. The dark current rises, warming him, filling him with calm. He breathes deeply, slowly, as if falling asleep. He's there… not there… not *anywhere*…

I know how it feels to put out your eyes, Nurse Shell… How it feels to pierce your heart with a steel rod… I'm brutal with you. You're nothing to me, nothing but flesh and bone. I'm going to make everyone see…

The memories end abruptly, and Will comes back to himself with a gasping shudder. He's hot; his skin tingles with a thousand volts and the nape of his neck is aching. He can feel his body respond inside, tightening and then relaxing as he grows slick. *Gideon was aroused by this, not me… Not me.*

It doesn't help. He's aching and sick to his stomach, freezing cold with what he just had to do but burning up at the same time. *What's wrong with me?*

He needs… He doesn't even know *what* he needs right now. He can feel Jack's concern from the doorway. Smell the rich musk of Dr Chilton's excitement as he peers over the larger Alpha's shoulder to watch Will at work.

He's not going to catch his breath like this, and Jack needs answers. He's growing impatient; Will can feel it.

'Erm…' He replaces his glasses and wipes away the tears dribbling down his cheeks. 'Far as we know, it's been over two years since the Chesapeake Ripper killed?'

'That's correct,' Jack says, entering the room but motioning for Chilton to stay where he is. Will nods, sighs again. Rubs at his stubble, trying to scratch off the feeling of scum clinging to him.

'When was Gideon admitted?'

Jack echoes Will's sigh.

'Almost two years ago,' he says heavily, and they all feel it.

This could be him.

***

He doesn't visit Hannibal that night, but after he's walked the dogs, Will curls up on the sofa and allows himself to call him. The Alpha answers after two rings, almost as though he's

been expecting it.

‘Hello, Will.’

Will closes his eyes and smiles. There’s just something in the way that Hannibal greets him; it loosens his muscles and makes breathing just a little easier.

‘Hello, Hannibal.’

Will’s voice is so warm and grateful; sat in his drawing room at home, Hannibal smiles to himself. *Perfectly conditioned*. The tone and phrase must be the same every time to elicit such a response, and he has spent weeks training Will to experience comfort when he says those two words.

‘How are you feeling?’ he asks, testing Will’s emotional resilience with such an obvious question.

Instead of snapping at him, Will merely huffs a laugh.

‘Tired,’ he admits, rubbing at his shoulders before giving up to fuss Winston when the dog headbutts him for more attention. ‘Alana and I are going back tomorrow to interview Dr Gideon.’

‘What did you see at the crime scene?’ Hannibal asks, keeping his tone mildly interested, despite the coiling snake in his gut. Will sighs again, and Hannibal frowns, worried. Did something happen with the insufferable Dr Chilton?

He wants to tear the other Alpha limb from limb.

‘I don’t know,’ Will says, rubbing his face again before returning it to Winston’s scruff. ‘Maybe it’s the Ripper… I’m not sure.’ He snorts. ‘Some profiler I turned out to be.’

‘Have you eaten?’ Hannibal asks, steering the topic of conversation away from Will’s faltering confidence. He needs him questioning himself, his sanity, no matter how strong the urge to build him up.

That will come later.

He who has a Why to live for can bear almost any How.

‘Er, not yet,’ Will admits, and he smiles when he hears Hannibal sigh. ‘I’ll have something before bed.’

‘I shall have to fatten you up,’ Hannibal says, absently turning the page of his medical book to the *Wound Man* illustration, narrowing his eyes when he thinks over the attack on the nurse. ‘Perhaps you could join me for dinner again soon.’

‘I’d like that,’ Will says softly, and he really does mean it. Hannibal is completely and utterly under his skin; he’ll take any excuse he can get to be near him.

They chat for a while longer until Will realizes how late it is, and then he scrambles up to let the dogs out one last time, all the while apologizing to Hannibal.

'I'll call you tomorrow,' he says, before blushing and chewing his lip. 'I mean… If you want… I can… Or I'll see you on Thursday, anyway…' He laughs, rubbing the back of his head at how flustered and *childish* he sounds. He hasn't been like this since he was a teenager with his first crush.

'I'd like that,' Hannibal says, keeping his laughter from his voice. Will really is *adorable* when he's embarrassed. 'I'll talk to you tomorrow, Will.'

'Good night, Dr Lecter,' Will says, forcing some semblance of control back into his voice, no matter how much his heart is pounding.

'Good night, Will.'

Hannibal ends the call, leaving Will staring at his cell phone with a stupid grin on his face and flushed cheeks. When he spots his reflection in the black surface, he scowls at himself.

What am I doing? This is so unlike me.

He fetches a beer and takes it outside, sitting on the porch steps to watch the moths flutter around the security lamps. It's cold, but he doesn't put a coat on, and steam rises from his burning skin.

Is this normal?

Sipping the cold liquid, Will stares out into the dark night, trying to understand exactly *when* he fell in love with Hannibal Lecter. And, more importantly, how he's going to protect himself against the Alpha, because he feels so completely and utterly *vulnerable* to him.

Please let me trust you, he thinks, closing his eyes against tears. *Please… Please don't hurt me.*

***

Alana drives him to the hospital the next day; they are both interviewing Dr Gideon, to compare and contrast notes. Dr Chilton's snide remarks about Alana's 'more or less helpful' notes following her interviews with Gideon make Will itch to bare his teeth at the pompous Alpha, but Alana takes it in her stride. She is far more tolerant of rudeness than Will is.

'I'll go first,' she says, and excuses herself from the room. Will follows; he has no intention of waiting for his turn anywhere near Chilton.

He takes a seat in the waiting area, tapping his fingers together and idly wondering what Hannibal is doing right now, before cutting off that train of thought and counting the dark spots on the tiles beneath his feet.

After almost an hour, Alana returns.

‘Your turn,’ she sighs, and gives his shoulder a reassuring squeeze. ‘Will you be OK?’

Will nods and swallows. He doesn’t trust himself to speak yet. The Beta looks tired; if it was difficult for her down in the maximum-security cells, he can only *imagine* how much it’s going to hurt him.

He’s right; the buzzing of the gates, the rage and impotent frustration pouring from the prisoners is overwhelming. Will places a hand on the far wall to steady himself, fighting bile as he concentrates on putting one foot in front of the other, down the row of cells to the last one. He can hear the other prisoners whispering, muttering. Several are Alphas, and they lift their heads to scent the air, growling and purring obscenities as he passes. Claws tickle his neck, rake his scalp. He can feel Samuel Coby’s hot breath on the nape of his neck and he pauses as a wave of dizziness threatens to topple him.

He’s not here… He’s over a thousand miles away… He can’t get me… Hannibal won’t let him.

Gideon is waiting at the bars of his cell door when Will reaches it. There is a metal chair placed in front of him, and Will can smell Alana’s scent on it. He has no intention of lowering himself below the Alpha’s level; he folds his arms and keeps himself closer to the far wall.

Dr Gideon’s eyes widen in surprise, blue flashing red for a moment as his brain registers Will’s scent.

‘An Omega? My, my, *what* a pleasant surprise,’ he croons, smirking when Will visibly tenses. ‘And here I thought the treat of the day was going to be Dr Bloom.’ He strokes the bars suggestively. ‘As I already told her; there’s no mystery here. I did it.’

‘The *mystery* is whether you are who you *say* you are,’ Will says, pacing back and forth to relieve the tension cramping his thighs. Every fiber in his body is screaming for him to leave, to escape before it’s too late. He grabs at the spark of anger in his gut, fueling his dark rage with it, and smirks at the surprised look on Gideon’s face when he lifts his head and stares at him straight in the eye. ‘Or *not*.’

‘Never liked being called the Chesapeake Ripper,’ Gideon says, leaving the bars to copy Will’s pacing. An instinctive response: if an Omega is preparing to flee, an Alpha will prepare to chase. ‘Perhaps something with a little more… wit?’

‘Why didn’t you take credit for the Ripper murders until now? Because you didn’t like the name?’

‘Just watching the goose-chase,’ Gideon replies. ‘Dr Bloom asked me the same questions, y’know. Now, *she* I understand; she’s a psychiatrist, after all. But *you*?’ He pauses, baring his teeth in a smile. ‘What is an *Omega* doing analyzing a serial killer for the FBI?’

‘Two years of goose-chasing,’ Will says, ignoring Gideon’s question. He stops pacing and leans back against the wall. ‘You must be a very patient man.’

‘Are you just going to run the psychopathic checklist here?’ Gideon snaps. ‘I’d expect that from Dr Bloom, but from *you*…’ He leers at Will. ‘Well, perhaps things could be a little

more *interesting*.'

'Did Dr Bloom offer you a Rorschach Test?' Will asks, and Gideon smirks.

'Oh, yes, and I'll give you the same answer that I gave her, pretty boy. If you're gonna show me *those* pictures, you should put a blood pressure cuff to my genitals, since it gives a *much* truer gauge to my reaction.' He licks his lips. 'Or, perhaps we could just ask *you*, since Omegas are supposed to be empathic, am I right?'

Will swallows fresh nausea and starts to move again. The sooner he's done with his questioning, the sooner he can leave.

'What *effect* were you hoping to have by killing the night nurse?' he asks.

'The effect I was hoping to have was her *death*,' Gideon says. He starts to pace as well, and Will can tell his presence is starting to rattle him; stirring up the Alpha's urge to Rut. Gideon is breathing more heavily than he was before Will arrived, and there is already a sheen of sweat on his forehead. 'Mission accomplished.'

'You brutalized her body *after* she was dead,' Will says. 'The Chesapeake Ripper usually does that sort of thing *during*, not after.'

Gideon growls and shakes his head, like an angry bull dislodging biting flies. He is getting annoyed by Will's questioning. He strides to the back of his cell and sits down on the toilet seat. Creating space between himself and Will. He doesn't want to go into Rut. Lose control. How long has it been since he was exposed to Omegan hormones? Has he ever even seen one? His wife was a Beta, after all.

'I do not have to convince you that I am the Chesapeake Ripper,' Gideon says, and Will can tell by his tone that their conversation is over. He nods, only too happy to accept this, though he can't help but glance up towards the security camera, where Dr Chilton is, undoubtedly, following every word.

'It's certainly what *somebody* needs.'

***

He drives the dogs to Hannibal's that night. He won't be able to sleep alone; he knows that already. He's already scrubbed his skin raw in the shower and walked over the fields until his legs hurt, but every shadow makes him jump and his skin prickles uncomfortably until his Alpha's house appears in front of his headlights.

My Alpha.

Hannibal *is* his Alpha. The shift from friend to potential partner has been slow, subtle enough that he missed it until now. But Jack's scent is beginning to rankle him, he's recoiling from other scents and Dr Gideon has made him sick with revulsion.

His body has chosen, even if his mind is slower to catch up.

I want Hannibal Lecter to mate with me. Bond me. Bite me. Claim me.

He parks up behind the Alpha's Bentley and guides the dogs into the garden, ushering them towards the kitchen door so as not to ruin Hannibal's expensive wood and carpeted floors.

The other man is waiting for him, having heard the distinctive rumble of his engine approaching. He ignores the damp animals tracking snow over the floor tiles and instead embraces the tense, quivering Omega.

Will is disheveled, thrumming with tension and clearly distressed by whatever happened at the Asylum today.

Someday, Jack Crawford will pay for what he does to you, Hannibal thinks, hushing his future mate and stroking his hair as Will sucks up his scent.

'I'm right here,' he promises, his thumb rasping across Will's beard as he cups his jaw. 'You're safe, Will.'

'I know,' Will mutters, flicking golden eyes up but unable to maintain the gaze. 'I'm fine, I just…' He huffs. 'I'm sorry I didn't call. It's rude to just show up here with my dogs.'

'Not at all,' Hannibal says, dropping a kiss to freshly washed and air-dried curls. 'You are always welcome.'

Will grimaces his thanks and sighs again. He fidgets, wanting to shrug out of his coat but not sure if that would be too presumptuous. Hannibal takes the decision from him by turning him and pulling the waxed jacket off, folding it over the back of the armchair in the corner of the kitchen.

'Would you like a drink?' he asks, moving towards the fridge in anticipation of acceptance.

'Actually,' Will says, steeling himself against embarrassment and fear. 'I'd like you to fuck me.'

Hannibal stops dead in his tracks and turns back to face him, shock painted across his face.

'Will…'

Will crosses the space in three long strides and shoves Hannibal back up against the fridge, making glass bottles rattle and clink inside. He claims the Alpha's mouth with his own, his hot, demanding tongue pushing past sharp teeth to stroke, taste and suck until Hannibal drowns under the affection.

'*Will*,' Hannibal pleads, carding his hands through the Omega's curls to slow the kiss and gently ease them apart before he loses control of the situation. 'Talk to me. Tell me what you're feeling.'

'Horny,' Will mutters, desperate hands scrabbling to undo Hannibal's zipper. 'I don't want to think. I don't want to…' He growls, frustrated at the Alpha's resistance. 'You *do* want this, don't you? You've wanted to fuck me since we first met!'

‘I want all of you,’ Hannibal promises, cradling Will’s face between his hands. ‘But I need to know why.’

‘I’m ready,’ Will says, almost ready to believe it himself. ‘I want you to fuck me and knot me and…’ He hesitates, fear snaking through his veins like ice, and it’s enough of an admission that he knows he’s lost whatever advantage he thought he had.

Stepping back, he turns golden eyes to the ceiling and bares his teeth in a snarl.

‘I need you,’ he admits, balling his hands into fists at his sides. ‘Gideon and Chilton… They think they can own me. Brand me. Mark me. But you…’

He shudders and whines softly when Hannibal comes up behind him. The Alpha drapes himself over Will’s back, nuzzling the curve of his throat and scenting him.

‘I do want you,’ Hannibal says, winding his arms tight around Will’s waist and hugging him back against his torso. ‘I want you in every way.’ He nips his earlobe, gently at first and pressing just hard enough to hurt. Just hard enough to make Will’s breath catch on a whimper. ‘But I want you to be sure. To have no room in your mind left for doubt that this is what you truly crave.’

Will shivers, fire licking at his insides at the promising weight of the other man over his back and the feel of teeth denting his flesh.

‘What if I say I am?’ he whispers, feeling disappointment battle with relief. ‘Would you fuck me tonight?’

‘If you said it without smelling of salt,’ Hannibal says, releasing his ear and pressing feather-light kisses to Will’s cheeks. ‘There’s no rush, *mylimasis*. I’ve been waiting a long time for someone like you. I won’t grow bored. I promise.’

***

In the lab the next morning, Will tucks himself back against a pillar in the medical lab so as not to be in the way while Price, Zeller and Beverly examine the body of Nurse Shell. Cuddled up in the Alpha’s bed, beneath the heavy, silk-lined quilt, he’d slept better than he could remember, but he’d had to wake early and take the dogs back to Wolf Trap. Now, having showered Hannibal scent from him and dressed in fresh clothes before coming into work, hiding evidence of their proximity, he feels softer than usual. His defenses weaker. He can sense more of the emotions in the room with him, and Jack’s are brittle and sharp. The Alpha feels guilty about something… It’s eating away at him, winding him tight enough to snap. Why?

‘There’s no detectable consistency with the Ripper victims,’ Beverly says, returning from taking a swab of the lowest stab wound. ‘He doesn’t hunt exclusively within his own ethnic group; he’s killed all creeds, colors, men and women.’

‘She has the *exact* same wound pattern as the last known victim of the Chesapeake Ripper,’ Zeller says. ‘I mean *exact*.’

Jack's growl rips through the cold lab air.

'We never found a *body* for his last known victim,' he snaps, and Beverly gives him a sympathetic look. Will frowns; he needs to refresh his memory on the case file.

Zeller looks uncomfortable.

'Then… the victim before that,' he mumbles.

Will casts his eyes over the body, wading into the dark current of his mind. It flows around him but there are rocks beneath his feet, catching and stabbing at him. It's not right. It's not… *elevated*.

'I *see* the Ripper, but I don't… *feel* the Ripper,' he says. 'This is plagiarism.'

'We never made the wound patterns for any of the Ripper's victims public,' Jack says, and Will doesn't have the strength in him to argue. He shrugs and shakes his head.

'Maybe he *is* the Ripper, I don't know, but if he's a plagiarist…' His shadow slithers through his heart, pumping into every muscle and filling him with a delicious sense of excitement. 'The real Chesapeake Ripper is gonna make sure *everybody* knows it.'

He holds Jack's gaze for a moment, savoring the line of concern creasing the Alpha's brow.

Do you see my shadow, Jack? Do you see the darkness?

He's right; he *knows* he's right, and he can't *wait* to see what the Ripper does next.

***

He calls Jack.

At 2.46am, the real Chesapeake Ripper calls Jack and plays a recording of Miriam Lass; an FBI forensics trainee that Jack pulled in to work on the Ripper case. A trainee who was a 'gifted' Omega, according to her file, one of the last to be allowed to enter law enforcement – with her parents' consent, of course – before Article 62 banned Omegas from any contact with such dangerous professions.

Now, standing across the lab table from him, Will understands the Alpha's guilt. His powerless rage.

I'm not the first Omega you've put in danger, he thinks, and a part of him hates Jack for not learning his lesson.

Beverly can't find evidence of the call, which either means it didn't happen, as Zeller thinks, or that the Ripper called from within Jack's neighborhood, creating no trace signal. Jack is insistent that it *did* happen, so much so that he threatens Zeller if he argues with him one more time. Will trembles under the anger emanating from the burly Alpha, and tries to distract him by piecing the facts together.

‘Then we know the Chesapeake Ripper is *not* Dr Gideon,’ he says, drawing Jack’s attention to himself in order to spare Zeller. ‘Because we know the call was *not* made from the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane.’

‘*That* we would’ve been able to trace,’ Beverly agrees.

Will sighs.

‘Are you *certain* it was a recording?’ he asks, stepping closer to Jack, now that he is calming down. Jack frowns at him, but Will *has* to try. ‘Jack, you said yourself; there’s no body…’

‘Miriam Lass is dead!’ Jack snarls, his calm evaporating instantly. ‘The Chesapeake Ripper is making it *very* clear that someone is plagiarizing his work!’

Zeller, never one to give up, tries one last time to reason with the Alpha.

‘It was 2.46 in the morning, Jack. You’re in a deep sleep, you’re roused, you’re disoriented. Might not even know you’re still asleep.’

Jack turns to him and says, with icy calmness,

‘I *know* when I’m awake.’

Zeller falls silent, bowing his head under the Alpha’s red-tinged glare. Will releases a long, slow breath.

I wish I did.

***

Hannibal is busy, so he can’t see him that night, and that means Will doesn’t sleep. Even cuddling a pillow, he can’t keep the nightmares at bay. Can’t stop heat chasing chills until his body sweats and shivers with no idea how to regulate his own temperature, insomnia making him want to claw out his eyes.

Sitting at his desk the next day, he grinds the heel of his hand into his eyes, trying to dig out the headache making him feel sick. The lecture hall is empty, the silence bearing down on him. Expectant.

I wish Hannibal was here.

He can hear hooves. Fear tickles his spine, raising the fine hairs on his arms. Will slowly lowers his hand, afraid of what he’ll see.

The Ravenstag steps into the doorway. It snorts, lowering its head to dip sharp antlers beneath the doorframe. It’s coming closer, growling at him, snarling at him, ready to devour him whole, and there’s *nothing* he can do about it –

‘Will?’ Alana’s voice snaps him back to reality and Will blinks, rubbing sweat from his forehead as he sits up straight in the chair. ‘You look like you were dreaming,’ the Beta says,

offering him a sympathetic smile. Will clears his throat.

‘I was, er, thinking about something else,’ he lies.

Was I awake just then? Was it real, or am I dreaming now?

‘Well, here’s something for you to think about,’ Jack says, coming up from behind the Beta and leaning down over his desk, dominating his vision, even as Will recoils from him. ‘We have a direct way of communicating with the Chesapeake Ripper, and we’d like to see if we can push him.’

Will frowns.

‘Push him toward what?’

‘We might be able to influence him to become visible,’ Alana says.

‘If we can enrage him,’ Jack adds, and Will’s darkness rumbles a laugh at the idea. He frowns and shakes his head.

‘Well, to what purpose, Jack? I don’t see what you’re asking.’

‘Do you think there’s a way to push the Chesapeake Ripper and focus his attention?’ Jack asks. Will’s mouth floods with bitter saliva and he has to fight to swallow it.

‘He’s already focused on Gideon as his adversary; don’t fool around,’ he begs.

Don’t annoy him, Jack. You don’t know what he’ll do.

‘Gideon is just a tabloid rumors right now,’ Jack says, glancing at Alana for support. ‘We need to make him the truth.’

Will’s heart starts racing at how reckless, how *selfish* this is.

Just because you feel guilty for failing two Omegas, Jack.

‘You might push the Ripper to *kill* again, just to prove he isn’t in a hospital for the criminally insane!’ he barks, but Jack shrugs.

‘I have to push, Will,’ the other man snarls, and Will knows, he *knows* what’s coming next. He sits forwards, locking blue-gold eyes on the Alpha.

‘Are you thinking about getting into bed with Freddie Lounds?’ he growls.

You’re betraying me, Jack. You promised me I’d never have to see her again.

You lied.

***

Seeing Freddie Lounds again is… unpleasant. But she is polite, and remains a safe distance across the table from them as Jack lays out the plan. She agrees, and the article comes out the next day.

Will is in his office when he gets the call from Jack. The Ripper was in his home; he called him from the house phone while Jack was interviewing Gideon, and played him the recording of Miriam's last moments again.

It's a mad rush to get there, in case they can intercept him. Will knows it's no use; the Ripper is too careful.

Too *good*.

Jack's anger scours his skin, and Will hunches against the wall, battered by the Alpha's rage.

'In my *house*, in my *bedroom*, where my *Omega* sleeps!' Jack growls, his shoulders back and chest out, as if he can make himself a bigger threat than the invisible remnants of an unknown killer.

Will tastes the air in the room, but there isn't even a trace of the Ripper's scent. He must be dulling it somehow. The fingerprints on the phone belong to Jack, Bella Crawford and Miriam Lass. There's a blond hair on Bella's pillow; presumably also Miriam's. Will frowns.

'Did you *know* you were sending her after him?' he asks quietly, and Jack sighs.

'I sent her after *information*,' he argues, and Will nods, accepting it as the half-truth it is. He needs Jack calm for what he's about to tell him.

'Whoever made that call thinks you were close to Miriam Lass,' he says, and Jack nods, before growing still when Will finishes his sentence. 'And… feel responsible for her death.' Jack frowns, and Will's shadow-self smiles at the pain he's caused.

You do feel responsible, don't you, Jack? Good. Because you are.

***

It's late when they finish at Jack's house. Everyone is quiet on the way back to the office, and they pack up ready to go home within an hour of arriving. Will hovers in the doorway; uncertain and fidgety. He doesn't want to go home; he doesn't want to be alone after today. After feeling Jack's pain…

He ducks inside an empty office and is ringing Hannibal before he can change his mind.

'Hello, Will.'

As soon as he hears the Alpha's velvety smooth voice, Will releases a shaky breath. Tiredness is like a wave that crashes through him, as though the adrenaline of the last few hours can finally stop pumping now that he's talking to his Alpha, and he rests his forehead against the doorframe.

‘Hannibal.’

‘Would you like to come over?’ Hannibal asks, smirking to himself as he retrieves a second steak from the larder. ‘I was just preparing dinner.’

‘Yes, please.’ Will manages to force some semblance of control back into his voice, making it sound gruffer than he meant. He clears his throat. ‘Sorry, I just…’

‘No need to apologize,’ Hannibal replies. ‘You sound as if you could do with a good meal and a long night’s sleep.’

Will barks a laugh and rubs his aching forehead, squeezing between his eyes in a vain attempt to release some of the throbbing pressure.

‘Feel as if I could sleep for a week,’ he mutters.

‘Perhaps some time off would be good for you,’ Hannibal suggests, and smiles at the cynical snort that Will can’t keep from making.

‘Yeah, unless the Ripper turns himself in or gets caught, I don’t see that happening anytime soon.’

‘Well then, we’ll just have to make do,’ Hannibal says. ‘Dinner, wine, perhaps a massage.’

Will snorts again, even as his insides twitch and his stomach clenches.

‘Massage?’ he asks quietly. ‘Is that what you call it?’

‘Would you prefer to go straight into sex?’ Hannibal asks mildly. ‘Forgo any pomp and ceremony and have me knot you?’

Will blushes scarlet at the overt reference to Alphan sex, furiously embarrassed at the responding twinge deep inside his body.

Yes, he thinks. *I want you to knot me.*

‘Er… I…’ He coughs, clears his throat and swallows. ‘I’d like dinner. And wine… And…’ He sighs. ‘We’ll see what happens.’ He bites his lower lip. ‘I, er, I either need to sort the dogs, before, or…’

‘Bring them,’ Hannibal says, choosing to forego his personal comfort and tolerate the animals for the sake of Will’s happiness and trust in him as the ideal Alpha. ‘I’ll prepare some meat and vegetables for them, as well.’

‘You’re… You don’t have to…’ Will huffs another sigh and rubs the base of his skull, just shy of his burning hot, tingling nape. ‘Thanks.’

I love you.

He doesn't say it but his tone is warm with gratitude. Hannibal's easy acceptance of his pack means everything to him. His last Alpha disliked the dogs, and was jealous of his affection towards them. But Hannibal… He's already fussing and grooming them as if they're his own, and goes out of his way to prepare the same fresh food as Will does.

'I'll see you soon,' Hannibal says, and they hang up.

Will finds himself standing where he is for another few minutes, grinning like an idiot, and then taps the phone against his lip. He doesn't want to become too needy. Weak. Annoying.

Omegan.

But his chest aches at the idea of cancelling. Of going back to Wolf Trap and sleeping alone. Or, more accurately, *not* sleeping because he's alone.

Growling at how pathetic he's becoming, Will digs around in his pocket for his Inhibitor drops and adds a couple of squeezes to each eye before knocking back a couple of Heat suppressants.

It's natural, he thinks, dimly wondering why he's trying so hard to convince himself. *Omegas are built to be Bonded… And Hannibal's different to the others.*

He drives home in a haze of headache and exhaustion, aching to be in Hannibal's arms again. He's bundled the dogs into the car and packed his overnight bag before he even realizes what he's doing, and, when he looks in the rearview mirror to turn the car around to head back to Baltimore, frowns at how golden his eyes are.

Didn't I just drop them?

He's hot; he drives with the windows down but his forehead is still sticky with sweat. His throat aches – he hopes he's not coming down with anything serious – and his belly twists with a nest of serpents. Nervousness, desire, hunger and fear, all battling for control.

Snow drifts in dizzying swirls and Will distracts himself from the hypnotic patterns by listening to jazz music. Winston sits in the front with him, having beaten the other dogs to the shotgun seat, and the wind whips the collie's ears back.

'You like him, right?' Will asks, glancing at the dog for reassurance. 'Think he'll be a good mate?'

Winston whines, shivering slightly in the freezing air. He nudges Will's arm, licking the salty sweat glistening there, but refrains from climbing onto his master's lap to comfort him as his body swirls with hormones.

'Yeah, I do, too,' Will says, and ruffles the dog's silky head. 'I guess tonight's gonna be the night. You'll all have to sleep downstairs next to the pantry.'

Hannibal and I are going to have sex. And who knows… He might even Bond me.

***

Will enters through the kitchen door again, shaking snow from his jacket as the dogs run up to greet the Alpha.

Hannibal looks up from the counter where he's busy preparing the garnishes for their plates and he smiles warmly at the flushed, sweating Omega.

'Hello, Will.'

At the Alpha's purring voice and gentle smile, Will's shoulders loosen. He steps inside and shuts the kitchen door, sealing them inside; a private world, for just the two of them.

He moves around the island to take the smaller man's coat and is pleasantly surprised by a fierce, hungry kiss from the near-prodromal Omega.

Will nips at Hannibal's lips, parting his own to welcome his questing tongue, and drags his fingers through the Alpha's hair, tugging gently before stroking it smooth again.

When they finally break for air, each of them panting, Hannibal purrs.

'Mm,' he murmurs, brushing his thumb over Will's cheekbone. 'You taste divine, Will.'

Will hums, grinning up at him.

'So do you,' he whispers, settling his hands on Hannibal's hips. He makes a show of sniffing the warm, beef-scented air. 'Dinner smells amazing.'

'Sirloin with a balsamic glaze and red wine jus,' Hannibal says, cupping the back of Will's head to hold him close, stroking his curls as Will relaxes against him. 'Shall we go through to the dining room?'

'Mm.' Will nods his agreement and follows Hannibal through the archway. He takes his seat across from the Alpha's and unfolds his napkin over his lap.

Hannibal pours him a glass of wine and then disappears into the kitchen to finish plating up, leaving Will alone with his thoughts and the soft, lilting notes of Bach.

Everything is an event with him, Will thinks fondly, swirling the wine before dipping his nose to savor its scent. Chocolate and coffee… He takes a sip, letting the thick taste coat his tongue before sliding down his throat. *If you could see me now, Dad. Drinking expensive wine like I know what I'm doing*.

He looks up as soon as Hannibal returns, his heart skipping a beat at the sight of the tall Alpha. Hannibal's shirt sleeves are rolled up, though he is still wearing his tie and waistcoat. He looks effortlessly casual, his blond hair combed back from his face and clothes unwrinkled even after a day wearing them. Will brushes errant dog hairs from his knees and tries to ignore the creases in his thick cotton shirt.

Hannibal sets the plates down and Will's mouth waters at the sight of the tender cut of meat. His stomach growls, reminding him that he hasn't eaten since… breakfast, perhaps? Maybe

even yesterday… He picks up his knife and fork and is cutting into the steak before Hannibal has even sat down.

'*Mm*,' he groans, closing his eyes as it melts onto his tongue. 'It's really good. Thank you.'

'You're most welcome,' Hannibal says, inclining his head with a small smile. 'Though I rather think I should have given you a larger piece.' His eyes twinkle at the teasing, and Will responds by stabbing a sautéed mushroom and adding it to his half-chewed mouthful, just to annoy him. However, Hannibal merely grins, amused by his lack of table manners, and chews his own mouthful slowly, tasting every flavor in the meat.

The wine complements the beef perfectly, and Will finishes his first glass quickly. Hannibal stands to pour him a second helping, ever the gentleman, always the host, but, for just a second, it makes Will's stomach clench with nerves and he lowers his knife and fork.

'Hannibal… what *is* this between us?' he asks quietly, heart stumbling when Hannibal tilts his head, his jaw tight and eyes narrowing at the question. 'This… thing that we're doing… Are you Courting me?'

Hannibal sets his cutlery down and chooses his words carefully as he takes a drink of his own wine. Then, once he knows what he wants to say, he clasps his hands and leans forwards to give Will his full attention. His hair is golden blond and silver against the cobalt blue of the dining room walls. His dark eyes hint at red, warming them under the soft light, and Will feels as if he could fall into them forever.

'It is hard for me to imagine finding someone worthy,' Hannibal admits. 'Someone with whom I can share myself, my *true* self… Someone with whom I can share my passions and my… desires.'

Will holds his breath, afraid to break whatever is hovering between them, but Hannibal merely offers him a small smile.

'What about you, Will? Do you see yourself creating a pair-bond with someone? Sharing your life with them?'

Will frowns. He opens his mouth to answer but Hannibal was honest with him and he deserves the truth in return. So, he closes it, and thinks about his answer before he speaks.

'I… don't know.' He taps his fingers on the table, smooths them out, and rubs his fingertips together. 'I have a history of… *complicated* relationships.'

Hannibal hums a non-committal noise and takes another slow, deliberate sip of wine.

I doubt any of your previous partners were comfortable with your darkness… Did they turn from you, Will, when they found out what you really are?

'Bonding's always seemed very *permanent*,' Will adds, speaking to his plate as he cuts the last bit of steak. 'Especially for the Omega.'

‘Not necessarily,’ Hannibal says lightly, returning his glass to its setting. He looks up as Will does, his eyes glinting and a dark smile toying with his lips when he sees Will’s pulse jump in his throat.

Getting closer to the truth of your scar, perhaps? You said you hadn’t been Cut; what, then?

Aloud, he continues,

‘A nuchalectomy is, arguably, one of the most traumatic things an Omega can experience. Physicians and psychiatrists have long since agreed that cutting out the crest given to them by a claiming Alpha is the equivalent to tearing apart one’s psyche, but it *can* be survived.’

Will swallows hard, his lips tingling at the casual reference to the mind-shattering pain experienced by a few very unfortunate Omegas. His own nape stings at the memory of slicing himself, and he grips his knife very tightly to keep from rubbing his scar, but he sees the way Hannibal’s eyes narrow at his show of vulnerability. He is slow to chew the steak on his fork, and Hannibal allows it, continuing to eat while he waits for Will to be ready to speak to him.

‘I’d prefer to, er, take my *time* and find the right person,’ Will eventually says, and Hannibal smiles.

‘A wise decision,’ he replies. Then, to move the conversation forwards, away from dangerous waters, he adds, ‘In answer to your earlier question; yes. I am Courting you.’

Will fiddles with his wine glass, sliding his fingers up and down the smooth stem. He tilts his head, brows drawing together into a half-frown.

‘I’ve never really done the whole “Courting” thing,’ he says, glancing up in time to see Hannibal lift his eyes from Will’s stroking fingers to his face. His heart skips a beat at the hungry look on the Alpha’s face and heat pools in his belly.

‘Its tradition date back hundreds of years,’ Hannibal says, distracting himself with another drink of wine. ‘Once Omegas became a rarity, the violence and death inevitably accompanying traditional Hunts was deemed unacceptable, and a more civilized approach was developed. Over time, it transformed into the rituals that we see today.’

‘All the banal savagery of the chase, wrapped up and tied down with bow,’ Will mutters. He shakes his head in disgust, sitting back against the chair and stretching his legs out towards Hannibal. ‘Muted and… watered down.’

‘Like blood in the water,’ Hannibal murmurs. He waits for Will to look at him again and then dips his head conspiratorially. ‘And yet the shark still senses the blood.’

Will tilts his head, agreeing, but his brow is still creased.

‘I’ve only ever dated one Alpha,’ he confesses, glancing up to check Hannibal’s interest. His Alpha’s eyes are locked onto him; he is intrigued. ‘She Courted me for a while, but it always felt very…’ He sighs, searching for the right word. *Benign.* ‘Polite.’

‘Maddeningly so,’ Hannibal teases, and smiles when Will huffs and nods. He nudges Will’s foot with his own. ‘How would *you* like to be hunted, Will?’

Will’s breath catches and heat sizzles down his spine, settling as an ache of longing in his loins. He can feel his eyes itch with the need to glow gold and the table separating them is suddenly too wide.

‘I haven’t given it much thought,’ he says carefully, folding his napkin and placing it to the side. The gesture does not go unnoticed by Hannibal, who tilts his head with a curious smile. Will stands up and carries their plates through to the kitchen, skin buzzing as Hannibal stalks after him.

‘Would you like to feed the dogs before, or after dessert?’ Hannibal asks, keeping half a step behind Will as the Omega scrapes the crockery and places the dishes into the sink. ‘Crème brûlée with salted caramel and fresh raspberries.’

Will removes the metal bowl of chopped meat, herbs and vegetables for the pack and scoops out helpings into the row of bowls Hannibal has already lined up alongside the pantry wall. When he’s done, he turns to face the Alpha and, setting the bowl aside, releases a single, ringing purr into the quiet of the room.

‘I think dessert can wait,’ he says, feeling his eyes flood with gold and his heart skip a beat as desire floods his body with heat. ‘Don’t you?’

Hannibal’s breath catches and he drinks in the sight of the honey-eyed Adonis before him. Will’s fingers tremble slightly but his shoulders are set with confidence as he lifts his hands to unbutton his shirt, revealing lean, toned muscles and stiffened nipples.

‘They’ve already cooled,’ the Alpha replies, mirroring the gesture by unbuttoning and removing his waistcoat. ‘We can eat them whenever we want.’

‘Good,’ Will says, stepping closer as he allows his shirt to fall to the ground. ‘Because I’m not in the mood for pudding, right now.’

‘Tell me what you want, Will,’ Hannibal says, loosening his tie and unbuttoning the next few buttons of his shirt. ‘Give voice to your desires.’

‘I want you to fuck me,’ Will says, very calmly and deliberately, holding Hannibal’s gaze as he closes the gap between them. He leans up and kisses the other man, arching his back and pressing their bare chests together. Hair rubs skin, nipples catch and their purrs mingle in a perfect harmony of deep and high, rich and pure.

‘In the bedroom?’ Hannibal whispers, and Will nods, taking him by the hand and leading him through to the entrance hall, and the stairs to the upper floor.

Hannibal is reminded of Will’s prodromal state; when the Omega had been flooded with Heat hormones and mad with the need to mate. Desperate to touch and be touched, burning hot and wild with instinct.

This is equally attractive, in its own, very different way. Will is battling nerves, fighting to stay in the present, with him, to keep from slipping into bad memories, and trepidation keeps the Heat at bay.

The trust he's placing in Hannibal's hands is dizzyingly attractive, and he cradles the Omega close as they make it to the master bedroom.

'Are you certain you want to do this?' he asks, and Will moans softly into the next kiss they share. The Omega pushes him onto the bed and straddles him, echoing the night they shared together.

'You make me feel safe,' Will breathes, carding his hands through Hannibal's hair again and holding each side of his face as he tries to crawl inside him. 'You make me feel… *whole*.'

'I see so much potential in you,' Hannibal says, hands roving up and down Will's body. He stops just shy of Will's nape, waiting for permission, and the Omega grants it by shuddering, rolling his hips down to press a slick-damp patch against his pants, and moving his hand to the back of his neck.

Oh… Oh, fuck.

Will's never felt anything like it. The fire that rolls through him burns away any coherent thought. Any hesitation or fear or doubt. He collapses against Hannibal, his heart tripping in his chest, battering his ribcage. Hannibal's musky scent, gritty cheeks, hard muscles and burgundy eyes… It's too much for him. He can feel the dark current inside him, welling up and dragging him down. He goes willingly, his breath rippling the air when he pants.

This… This, forever.

Hannibal gives Will's neck another squeeze, watching as the Omega's eyes flicker between gold and blue. Will's scent is thickening with fresh prodromal hormones, heavy and sweet, and his mouth waters at the fresh, sweet tang of Will's slick.

Rising quickly, he pushes the purring, trembling man to the bed and pulls off his boots, socks, pants and boxers, stripping out of his own clothes and leaving them in an uncharacteristic heap on the floor in his haste to cover him with his body once more.

Will shudders and rocks his hips against Hannibal's familiar, comforting weight. He wraps his arms around the Alpha's broad shoulders, bending his knees to lock his ankles around a trim waist. The feeling of skin on skin is perfect and he barely has enough awareness left to blush when slick dribbles out of him.

Hannibal smirks at the needy, wanton Omega beneath him, and, after kissing Will dizzy, sits back just enough that he can swipe a finger through one of the glistening trails on Will's inner thigh. Will quivers, sucking in a breath and holding it in tortured anticipation as the Alpha lifts his finger to his lips. Locking eyes with the other man, Hannibal very deliberately sucks on his finger, his throat vibrating with a purr at how innocent and fresh it tastes.

'Mmm. Perfect.'

Will can hear his pulse crashing in his ears. Hannibal just tasted him, tasted *that*… It's the most erotic thing he's ever seen, but it's not what he wants.

Not what he *needs*.

Hannibal smirks again when Will tries to lower his legs. The Omega wants to grind his hips down into the bedding, to ease the ache of emptiness inside. Hooking his elbows under each of Will's knees, Hannibal locks him in place, up off the bed, unable to move, earning himself a growling moan.

Please… Oh, please…

Will drags his nails over Hannibal's shoulders, tearing at the skin, raising angry red welts across his biceps. He raises his head, biting and kissing at Hannibal's chin and jaw, tasting their mingled sweat as the building heat of him causes it to roll from their foreheads.

Hannibal endures the pain; he wants to savor this time with Will, and prepare him so that it doesn't hurt him. As slick as he is, this is still a new experience for him. He deserves to be cherished.

'Roll over,' he says softly, sliding his hand up the underside of Will's trembling thigh, over the curve of his buttock and behind the velvet soft skin of his balls.

Will shudders, going willingly as the Alpha turns him. He arches his spine, pressing his forehead down into the damp sheets, filling his nose with his own scent. He tucks his knees up under him, lifting his ass in the air.

It's the classic mating position. His brain is screaming at him to display for Hannibal, to call for him, and he flexes his muscles, rolling his hips invitingly as desperate, pleading little whines stutter from between swollen lips.

Hannibal swallows a moan at how beautiful Will looks, moving his body to entice his Alpha closer, sweet musk rolling off him as his body pulses, pushing more slick out of him. He kneels up behind him, placing a steadying hand on the base of Will's back and splays his other hand over Will's crack, purring at the way Will lifts himself up even more. Then, holding Will's cheeks apart, Hannibal brushes his fingertip over the tight, puckered entrance, rewarded with a sharp gasp from the Omega, and swirls the slick beading on the pale pink flesh.

'Please… Hannibal, *please*…'

Will's voice cracks. He's so hot; his bones are melting with it. Everything shrinks to the feel of Hannibal's finger, coated with slick, pushing at the tight ring of muscle. He feels another wave flow down from his tingling scalp to his toes, and he pushes out before pulling Hannibal's finger all the way in, tightening in a blisteringly hot vice around him.

Hannibal's heart skips a beat at how hot and tight Will feels. He can feel his own hardness throbbing, and his eyes glow red as he fights the need to slam into the Omega's body, knot him and fill him with his seed. Instead, he concentrates on withdrawing his finger a little,

hushing the panicked whimper from Will at the idea of Hannibal leaving him, crooking the knuckle when he slides back in. He repeats the movement, pushing down each time as he does, earning a hissing moan from the Omega. There's another shudder and Will tightens before releasing more slick, wetting Hannibal's knuckles. He purrs again, a low and rumbling sound of reassurance, and slips a second finger inside Will's body.

Will gasps at the sensation of Hannibal inside him. It's tight but there's so much *more* that he needs. He can feel himself opening up above the end of Hannibal's fingers; they're not long enough to satisfy him and tears of frustration well in his eyes. He trembles, rolling his forehead on the mattress to bare his scorching neck, whining and whimpering for Hannibal to bite him. Bond him. Take him. Make him truly whole.

'Easy, Will,' Hannibal murmurs, sliding his hand from the base of Will's back up to his nape. He presses down and squeezes tight in a dominant hold, paralyzing him with a thumb digging into the cluster of nerves right behind his pulse point. He hears the plaintive little sounds slipping past Will's lips, the huffing little breaths as he realizes he can't move, can't do anything but let Hannibal massage his insides and stretch him until he relaxes, and the Alpha groans to himself as his hips rock forwards. His balls tighten up and he bites his lower lip to keep the pleasure at bay; he has no intention of reaching climax before he is buried deep inside his Omega.

Oh God…

Will's breath falters as Hannibal adds a third finger. It aches, but every time the Alpha rubs against his prostate it feels like a livewire, something burning white. He screws his eyes tight shut and bears down, curling his fists into the sheets as fire rips him apart. Hannibal's hand on his nape sends pleasure crashing down his spine. He's dizzy. He can't breathe. He's going to come. He can't stop it. It's too good; the fingers inside him, slipping in and out, rubbing against that spot inside him every single time...

He screws his eyes shut, panting open-mouthed into the sheets, rocking and quivering. He can't find a rhythm. It's all too good. His balls tighten and he comes, suddenly and violently, his voice breaking as he bites down into the wad of fabric by his chin, tears coursing down his cheeks as he spasms around Hannibal's fingers, spilling himself over his stomach and onto the quilt. Only it doesn't *stop* because *Hannibal doesn't stop*, and the tide crashes into him again. Every nerve is on fire, muscles screaming and melting as the white light coils inside his chest again.

'Ha- Hannibal, please!' he gasps, choking on a sob as he comes a second time.

God. It's too good…

He's oversensitive, stinging with it and spiking pleasure and pain with every judder but it doesn't end.

Hannibal watches as three, nearly four fingers slip inside Will's pulsing hole up to the knuckles.

He's ready.

Holding his breath, he withdraws his hand and coats himself with Will's slick, hissing through his teeth at the tingling heat of it. He growls, digging the nails of his slippery hand into Will's hips to hold them both steady as he lines himself up. There's a moment of resistance and then he's sliding inside and Will is so hot and so tight, and Hannibal can already feel his climax gathering at the base of his spine, tingling in his balls. He takes a slow breath to control himself and forces himself to stop, half inside Will, waiting so that the Omega's body can adjust.

It's not felt this good in years.

'*Yesss*,' Will pants, trying to rock his hips back, to take Hannibal whole. He fights against the hand at his hip, holding him still, fights against the hand on his nape, locking him in position. Gasps and wheezes and whines, his toes curling as he flexes his biceps and fists the sheets with shaking hands. He's powerless; he can't do anything to make the Alpha knot him.

Will's scent is overwhelming. Sweet musk, like a forest river, earth and blood. The thrill of the hunt. The joy of a kill. Hannibal can hear his growls ripping the air between them as he sinks further inside the Omega's welcoming body, embraced by tight muscles and burned with hot slick, the slap of skin on skin as Will takes every inch of him. He grits his teeth, his blond hair falling over his face and sticking to his sweaty forehead as he rocks his hips, drawing halfway out, shuddering at the way Will tightens around him, refusing to let him go.

'Fuck,' Will snarls, twisting his head and grinding his cheek on the bed when Hannibal loosens his grip on his nape. He opens his eyes, looking back over his shoulder at the Alpha behind him, at the hungry, feral look on Hannibal's face, the rippling muscles, shiny skin, bared teeth and red eyes. 'Yesss, Hannibal, *yes*. Please…'

Hannibal falls forwards, releasing Will's neck to brace himself with a hand on either side of Will's fists, his chest pressed flat to Will's damp back as he fucks him, brutally hard and fast. He can't take his time with this; it's too good. He can feel himself rapidly losing control, slipping into Rut, and he can't afford for that to happen.

He twists his hips, alternating long, rough strokes with light, teasing flicks, and Will convulses beneath him, crying out as he comes for a third and final time. He tightens almost painfully around Hannibal, muscles clenching in waves that rip Hannibal's orgasm from him and trigger him to knot. The Alpha snaps his hips, three, four more times and then his breath is gone and he's locked inside Will's body and everything is tight and tender and so, *so* good.

Gold and red flash behind his eyelids and Hannibal sinks his teeth into the muscle of Will's shoulder, spilling blood as he tears at his flesh.

Will cries out, his body rigid beneath the Alpha, his neck aching painfully because Hannibal didn't bite him *there*, even though he's filling him, utterly and completely.

'Will…' Hannibal licks and sucks at the livid bruise and ring of teeth marks on Will's shoulder, shaking with the strength of his orgasm.

That was…

He hums to himself as he nuzzles his Omega's damp curls, kissing just beneath Will's ear, enfolding Will's limp hands in his own and twining their fingers together.

He's trapped, locked in place by Hannibal's knot, and Will trembles beneath the Alpha, fighting to catch his breath.

'Why?' he croaks, swallowing the lump in his throat. He tries again. 'Why didn't you bond me?'

Hannibal shifts his weight to the side, pulling Will with him so that they are spooning. He reaches down, fumbling for the quilt, and drapes over their cooling bodies. Kisses Will's neck again, enjoying the richness of his scent where it has blended with his own. A perfect combination.

'Because,' he says simply, earning a growl from Will. He laughs, nipping at the Omega's ear, wrapping his arms tightly around Will's chest when the smaller man tries to squirm free. 'You haven't earned it,' he whispers, low and seductive into Will's ear.

Will stills immediately, his heart thumping in his throat.

Earned it…? That's not how it works. An Alpha earns the right to bond, not an Omega. He can't….

But he *can*, he knows he can. He can do anything for Hannibal, and his dark shadow purrs its approval at the idea of pleasing the Alpha enough that he mates him.

Hannibal smiles into Will's hair. Will is intrigued; excited by the idea of it. He can tell by the thrum of his body, the desire and hunger in his scent; it tastes like blood, like the wild.

Will wets his lips. He reaches down and pulls one of Hannibal's hands up, kissing knuckles and nodding to show that he understands. It would be a partnership; each of them fighting for the right to be together.

Hannibal purrs at the way Will responds to his challenge. He rubs his cheek over his head, marking himself with Will's scent even as his seed stains his partner's insides. Will's breathing slows, deepening into a state of utter relaxation, and Hannibal gives a contented sigh because everything is progressing according to plan.

Let yourself go, Will, and I will bond you. I will give you everything.

***

The next day, Jack summons Will and Beverly Katz to the old observatory in the outskirts of Baltimore.

'The last call was made to Jack's cell from a disposable phone traced here,' Beverly explains, her hands deep in the pockets of her leather jacket to ward off the chill of the foggy afternoon as she fills Will in on the latest details. 'Or within a hundred feet of here.'

Will nods, keeping pace at her heel. He's trying to concentrate on the case but all he can think about is Hannibal. Having sex with Hannibal. Hannibal Courting him.

How he can earn the Alpha's approval to Bond him.

'What was Miriam Lass looking into?' he asks, berating himself for not focusing.

Concentrate on the case. A missing Omega… It's important.

'Medical records,' Beverly says. 'If the Ripper was a surgeon, she thought he might have treated one of his victims.'

Will frowns; not a difficult path to follow… How did they lose her?

'Have they retraced her steps?'

'The ones they could find,' Beverly says. They start to climb the steps to the observatory, towards the brooding Alpha waiting for them. 'She made a jump somewhere they couldn't explain.' She glances at him. '*You* make those jumps.'

Don't guess, Beverly… Don't guess…

Will squashes the rising panic at the idea of the Alpha realizing he's an Omega in disguise. He washed his hair with scent-dulling shampoo before leaving Hannibal's house, he's wearing Beta spray and he added twice as many drops to his eyes as usual.

She can't know. She *can't*.

'The evidence has to be there,' he mumbles.

I'm not special.

'Every surgeon that came into contact with *any* of the Ripper victims has been thoroughly vetted or is currently under observation,' Beverly replies, shrugging helplessly.

Guess it was an Omega thing, the shrug says, and Will frowns, curious.

'Including Dr Gideon?' he asks, tilting his head to bare his throat for Jack in greeting.

'*Dr Gideon* wasn't in my bedroom,' Jack snaps. 'The Chesapeake Ripper was.' He pulls out his phone. 'The last call left something the others didn't. A phone number.' He hits re-dial and holds the phone to his ear. Waits.

A phone rings, distant but there. Will frowns… It's coming from *inside* the observatory…

Jack turns and leads the way inside, Will and Beverly following. Nerves and excitement feed his dark shadow and Will's breath catches as it coils in his stomach, winding around his ribs to fill his heart with anticipation.

They follow the ringing, up the spiral stairs to the top. Through plastic-wrapped crates and desks until they find it. A cell phone, clutched in the mottled, dead fingers of an amputated arm. Jack's growl rumbles through the cold air, his eyes flashing red as he reads the note beside the decaying flesh.

What do you see?

***

That evening, sitting before the fire sharing a brandy with Jack, Hannibal casts his mind back to the day that Miriam Lass came to see him. A bright, eager young Omega. Her scent had reminded him of his childhood summer, of wildflowers and sweet meadow hay. But there had been no potential in her; no darkness to match his own, no answering call from the shadows.

She had found his drawing of the Wound Man, recognizing it from his latest victim. He smelled her fear, saw her moment of realization before he choked the air from her, paralyzing her with a grip on her crest as he compressed her windpipe.

Lowering his nose to the glass, Hannibal savors the brandy. There is something in the smell that reminds him of Will, of his earthy scent. Of the shadow that Hannibal sees in his eyes.

I want to share myself with you, he thinks, savoring the burn as the spirit slips down his throat. *I want to show you who I am…*

Can I trust you?

Sorbet

Chapter Summary

When a man is found mutilated in a hotel room bathtub, Jack is convinced the Chesapeake Ripper is responsible. Will must prove that there is a different killer out there, but after meeting another of Hannibal's patients at their night at the opera, he is distracted with worries about what he really means to the Alpha.

Hannibal changes tactics in his plan to help Will realise his dark potential, but he faces his own challenges as his feelings for the Omega deepen.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Turning from a high definition image of a severed tongue marking the page of a Bible, Will addresses his rapt audience.

'The Chesapeake Ripper kills in sounders of three,' he says, watching the concentration on their faces from behind the safety of his glasses. 'He did his first victims in nine days. Annapolis, Essex, Baltimore.' He uses his remote to flick through the slides as he speaks, highlighting each point with another gruesome image. 'He didn't kill again for eighteen months, then there was another sounder of three in as many days, all of them in Baltimore.'

He keeps his back turned to the class; they can hear him just fine, and he wants to concentrate on the images, the tongues, the mutilated bodies… The *art* of the killings…

'I use the term "sounders" because it refers to a small group of pigs,' he says. He finally turns, and, seeing a few of them frown, explains, 'That's how he sees his victims. Not as people, not as *prey*. Pigs.' The silence settles, heavy and uncomfortable. Will swallows, ignoring the way his dark shadow purrs at the unease flickering through the students. 'Eleven months after the sixth victim, there was a seventh. Two days later, the eighth is killed in his workshop.' He brings up the slide with the Workshop Wound Man. 'Every tool on the pegboard where they hung was used against him and, as with previous murders, organs were removed. The removal of organs and abdominal mutilations means someone with anatomical or surgical know-how. There… is a *distinctive* brutality.'

Will pauses when he catches Jack's scent; heavy Alpha musk laced with bitter anger. He glances over to the door, and there he is, watching him with shadowed eyes. Will's heart falters but he has to keep going; it's important that as many people understand the Ripper as possible. That way, they have a better chance of catching him. His dark shadow whispers sweet nothings to him as he clicks to the next slide and meets Jack's eye; it is a copy of Miriam Lass's FBI ID.

‘An FBI trainee named Miriam Lass was investigating private medical records of all the known victims when *she* disappeared. She’s believed to be the Ripper’s ninth, but no trace of her was found until recently, two *years* later, when her severed arm was discovered.’ Warmth flutters in Will’s belly and his shadow coils like a snake, making him smile. ‘Only because he *wanted* it to be,’ he adds, a distinct note of pride in his voice. He can’t tell if the tightness to Jack’s jaw is from guilt or because he’s uncomfortable with Will’s admiration for the Ripper’s work. Perhaps both. Will doesn’t really care.

‘True to his established pattern, the Chesapeake Ripper has remained consistently theatrical.’

And I can’t wait to see what he does next.

Jack doesn’t stay until the end of the lesson. Will turns to pace behind his desk and when he looks back to the door, the Alpha has gone. *It’s eating away at you, isn’t it, Jack? The guilt… The loss… What will happen when you lose me?*

Will shakes his head to clear the dark thoughts. Jack’s not going to lose him. He’s fine. In fact… He smiles as his phone flashes, signaling the end of class. Dismisses everyone and packs up quickly, his stomach quivering in anticipation of the evening ahead. He’s better than fine. He’s great.

Hannibal is taking him to the opera tonight.

Driving home as fast as the dark country roads allow, Will lets the dogs out, feeds them and then showers off the day’s Beta spray and sweat. He washes his hair with a new shampoo – the cedarwood scent reminds him of Hannibal’s aftershave – and stares deep into his gold-ringed eyes, his hands trembling when he leaves the pheromone spray untouched. Hannibal asked him not to hide his true scent for one evening, and Will is confident that he won’t run into anyone from Quantico rubbing shoulders with Baltimore high society. Besides, next to Hannibal nobody will notice him. Still, it will be the first time in years that he’s gone out without the safety of the spray... He feels almost sick, his belly fluttering even as his dark shadow pulses with excitement.

He’s rented a tuxedo for the occasion, and he takes his time dressing, checking the sharp lines of silky fabric, picking off stray dog hairs and then growling to himself when he realizes he doesn’t *actually* know how to tie a bowtie. The Alpha will be here any moment and he’s stood there with a strip of black silk around his neck like an idiot teenager late to the prom.

Fuck… What the fuck am I doing?

His ears prick to the crunch of tires over gravel outside and Winston barks at the sound of the Bentley’s engine. Will gulps, his throat bobbing against the tight shirt collar, and he hurries downstairs to open the front door before Hannibal can even knock, let alone wait in the cold.

‘Hello, Will.’ Hannibal smiles at him, dark eyes raking over Will’s suit. *So handsome*… His lips twitch into a wider, amused smile when he sees Will’s attempt at a bowtie, and he steps closer as the Omega blushes and bows his head in embarrassment. ‘Allow me?’ he asks, cupping Will’s chin with a finger to lift his head and placing a gentle kiss on his lips.

Will moans at the touch, reaching up to hold Hannibal's hips. The Alpha is tall and regal in his tuxedo, wearing a burgundy silk scarf and long black coat to ward off the chilly night. His blond hair is combed back from his face and he is wearing the silver cufflinks that Will jokingly picked out for him when he discovered the Alpha's dresser full of accessories at the weekend. Breathtakingly handsome; he is easily the most impressive person Will has ever seen. He wants to call the evening off in favor of staying at home and fucking, but Hannibal really wants to share this with him, so he won't suggest it. *We always have afterwards*, he thinks, giving Hannibal's hips a final squeeze before stepping back so that Hannibal can sort him out.

Hannibal parts his lips, tasting the thick, sweet musk of Will's desire as he deftly knots the smaller man's bowtie. Will's hair holds a lingering trace of cedarwood, and his natural Omega scent is, for once, unimpeded by the sour taint of Beta chemicals. He smells delicious; warm and welcoming, like long-forgotten summer days, the thrill of the chase and wild sex, all crashing together in glorious symphony.

'Perfect,' he murmurs, holding Will's cheek for a moment longer, savoring the warmth of him, appreciating the sleek, well-fitting suit tapering in at Will's trim waist and flowing down toned thighs. 'You look perfect, Will.' He dips his head closer and brushes his nose across Will's forehead before dropping a kiss to his hairline. 'Perhaps I need to take you to see my tailor; you look good in a suit.'

Will huffs a laugh but he doesn't pull away. Instead, he leans closer to the Alpha, knocking their shoulders together, and turns his face so that Hannibal will brush his lips in a final kiss before they part.

'I have suits,' he murmurs. 'I just don't wear them. And I don't think I can *afford* your tailor.' He adjusts his jacket one last time and then grabs his coat and scarf from the banister. 'Ready?'

I would much rather take you home and undress you in my bed; lay you bare and tease you until you come screaming, Hannibal thinks, but he nods because he has the tickets now, it reflects well on him because it is for a charitable cause, and the Chairwoman of the Baltimore Philharmonic Orchestra invited him personally. *Besides*, he thinks, smirking to himself as they get into the car; w*e have afterwards*.

'What should I expect?' Will asks, breaking the companionable silence halfway towards the city. He starts tapping his fingers on his knee, his typical series of five and then a pause. He's nervous. Hannibal can smell it rolling from him and he can see the tension tightening his shoulders. His stomach clenches in response because he wants to protect him, and he reaches over to enfold Will's hand with his own, giving it a comforting squeeze.

'I'm afraid you'll have to endure a great many stuffy Alphas,' he says, smiling when Will snorts a laugh. 'Most of them are bonded, of course.' He gives Will a coy smile, his eyes glinting. 'No doubt you'll find yourself the object of fascination for the evening.'

Will can't stop the panicked whine that slips past his lips, and Hannibal chuckles at the look of horror on his pale face. He squeezes Will's hand again, lifting it so that he can brush his lips across the Omega's knuckles.

‘We shall have to leave them wondering,’ he says softly. He releases Will’s warm hand to reach inside his breast pocket, withdrawing the bottle of heat suppressants. ‘It’s time for your evening dose.’

‘Thank you,’ Will whispers, taking the bottle and shaking a tablet loose. Hannibal nods; they both know he’s grateful for more than just the medication. There is an unspoken promise of protection between them; Hannibal will shield Will from any unwanted attention, allowing him to be himself without fear.

‘I think you should keep them,’ Hannibal says, nodding down to the tablets. ‘Wouldn’t want you to miss a dose.’

‘Thought you couldn’t trust me,’ Will replies, smiling as he pockets the medication. Hannibal grins at him.

‘I think you’ve learned your lesson,’ he replies.

‘Oh, so it was a *punishment*?’

‘Of course.’ Hannibal winks at him and Will snorts a laugh, shaking his head and returning his gaze to the window.

Hannibal smiles to himself. What Will doesn’t realize is that he has taken the opportunity to swap the heat suppressants for something much more important; *scent* suppressants. They will need a few days to take effect, allowing him to enjoy Will in his entirety this evening, but very soon nobody will realize that the Omega is fast approaching heat.

‘I have some new Iris Inhibitor drops for you to try, as well,’ he adds, glancing at Will after a few minutes of quiet. ‘You said the others were not as effective as you’d like.’

‘Just don’t want to risk getting caught,’ Will mumbles. ‘Thank you.’

‘You’re very welcome.’ Hannibal smirks to himself. He’s not one to change plans halfway through, but he must evolve as his relationship with Will changes. An even more extreme detox will hurt Will, maybe even injure him, but his mate is strong enough to survive it; of that, Hannibal has no doubt. Will doesn’t need the libido enhancers; he has proven more than amorous enough without added stimulants, and his gold eyes, whilst attractive, could prove dangerous if the wrong people notice them. Hannibal will provide strong Inhibitor drops and trust himself to know when Will is lost to prodrome, when he is most susceptible to his *persuasion*.

They pass the rest of the journey in companionable silence; Hannibal listens to the radio and Will checks his phone for any last-minute messages from Jack. The Ripper hasn’t struck, and hopefully won’t this evening. He turns the cell off as Hannibal parks, following at the Alpha’s heel as they ascend the steps inside the hall.

Oh god… The moment he steps inside and sees the crowd of well-dressed Alphas, the odd Beta and bonded Omegas, Will’s stomach fills with an icy knot. He swallows hard, his heart stuttering in his chest. Several Alphas turn, scenting the air for the source of distress, their

eyes flickering red when they spot him. Will clenches his hands into fists so tight his nails cut bloody half-moons into his palms; he can feel himself shrinking closer to Hannibal, seeking his safety, but he *refuses* to be so pathetic. He squares his shoulders and clenches his jaw, meeting the eye of any Alpha daring to look him in the face. *Fuck you. Fuck you all*.

Hannibal's chest warms with pride as he watches Will feed his fear to the dark shadow of his anger. He is gloriously defiant, blue-gold eyes flashing a challenge to any Alpha foolish enough to look at him, his lip curling back from his teeth in disdain when they look away.

They are not worthy of you, he thinks, stepping closer to dip his head to scent Will's curls; it is a gesture designed to both soothe his Omega and send a clear signal to the watching Alphas that Will is taken.

At Hannibal's closeness, Will releases a slow breath. He closes his eyes, trying to block out the buzz of emotions around him. Turning to the Alpha, he nuzzles closer, resting his cheek on Hannibal's shoulder for a moment as he soaks up his comforting scent. He has to force himself to step away; it feels like ripping skin and he swallows a few times before he trusts himself to speak.

'You owe me for this,' he says, trying for a light, teasing tone. Hannibal smiles at him and deftly reaches for the tray of champagne flutes passing by, held up by a smart young waiter. He hands Will a glass and holds his own up to toast.

'Then I shall work hard to repay you,' he says, his eyes sparkling. Will's breath catches at the implication and the gold band thickens until there is barely a rim of blue left. Hannibal purrs, low enough that only his Omega can hear it, before sipping his wine. Will watches the Alpha's throat move as he swallows and he steps closer; he wants to lick it, kiss it, bite it…

'Hannibal; do tell us who you're hiding.'

The interruption of a woman's voice sends a shock of embarrassment through Will's skull, settling like a razor on the nape of his neck. He flinches and pulls back, instinctively putting Hannibal's shoulder between himself and the Alpha who has just interrupted them. More handsome than beautiful, she offsets her sharp black haircut with a low-cut velvet gown and bright red lipstick.

'Madam Chairwoman; a pleasure,' Hannibal says, turning with a smooth smile, all charm and no trace of irritation. 'Allow me to introduce my companion; Will Graham.'

Will forces himself to shake with the overbearing Alpha; at least she is wearing black silk gloves to her elbows, so he doesn't have to touch her bare flesh. Her dark eyes rake over him with hungry abandon and she smiles at what she sees.

'An unbonded male Omega,' she murmurs. 'I don't think I've ever seen one so old. Wherever did you find him, Hannibal?'

'We work together,' Will says, his voice sharp with anger at being spoken *about* rather than *to*. The Alpha's eyes widen in surprise, and then she giggles.

‘You *work* together…?’ She looks at Hannibal for confirmation, which only angers Will further. He can feel black tar pumping through his veins and it takes everything in him to hold still; to keep from clawing her throat open. She is exactly the kind of Alpha that he hates.

‘Yes; Will teaches criminal psychology,’ Hannibal says, surreptitiously placing himself further in front of Will and directing the Chairwoman’s attention to himself. ‘A fascinating subject, though hardly the topic for an evening such as this.’ He begins to steer her towards the inner doors. ‘Are you looking forward to the performance?’

Thank you, Will thinks, gulping down his champagne in an attempt to calm his jittery nerves. He follows close behind, handing his empty glass to a waitress as soon as he can. The Chairwoman is three rows ahead of them, and Hannibal gives him a conspiring grin when they take their seats. It seems she is overbearing with everyone. The thought is somewhat soothing, and Will manages to return a flicker of a smile, pressing his outer thigh against Hannibal’s as the lights dim in anticipation of the show.

The Alpha reaches down and laces his fingers with Will’s, holding his hand on his knee. Tilting his head down, he brushes his lips over the shell of Will’s ear, his breath warm against the Omega’s skin.

‘I’m glad you’re here, Will,’ he murmurs, taking a long, slow breath to enjoy the way Will’s musky scent deepens and becomes rich and smooth as he relaxes under the touch, sweetened with the first hint of slick. An Alpha behind them shifts and clears his throat; he is clearly reacting to Will’s pheromones, and Hannibal pulls back so as not to trigger a pack rut. He keeps hold of his Omega’s hand, though, and Will seems perfectly content to sit quietly beside him as the orchestra warms up and the first wavering notes drift over the few remaining people taking their seats.

Hannibal tracks Will’s reaction to the crowd and the music throughout the first act, but it is difficult not to become overwhelmed by the soprano’s skill and natural ability. Her voice is rich and smooth, ringing from the stage as she sings of love, loss and triumph. He forgets to holds Will’s hand after a while, absorbed with savoring each perfect sound, the sum of it a breathtaking performance that squeezes his heart and snatches his breath.

Watching the emotion on Hannibal’s face, *feeling* it pouring out of him as the aria rises to its climax, Will’s chest tightens until he’s sure it’s about to burst. Tears that only brim in Hannibal’s eyes trickle down his cheeks; he tries to wipe them away without drawing attention to himself, but the way Hannibal leans closer and squeezes his knee says that the Alpha has noticed. Will gives him a wobbly smile and tries to control his breathing; he doesn’t want to make more of a fool of himself than he already has, especially when he’s sure there is a Beta in the back row staring avidly at them.

Hannibal, however, doesn’t seem to find Will embarrassing, or notice his admirer. He is entirely captivated in the music, a true hedonist enjoying life’s pleasure, and, when the show is over, he is the first to rise, leading the standing ovation as the soprano bows, gracefully accepting the compliments.

‘I can see why you wanted to bring me,’ Will says, standing closer so that he can speak into Hannibal’s ear over the thunder of applause. ‘You really do have a passion for the opera.’

‘You’ll find that I am passionate about a great many things,’ Hannibal replies, smiling down at him.

Will chews his lip, hesitating at the idea of kissing him in public. As much as he wants to, he doesn’t want the Alphas around them to think he’s just another lovesick Omega worshipping the ground on which his mate walks… though the idea that he is altering his behaviour *because* of what they think also riles him… He jumps when Hannibal gives his shoulder a squeeze, and rolls his eyes at him when Hannibal grins.

‘How I would *love* to get inside that head of yours,’ the Alpha murmurs, cupping Will’s cheek and stroking his thumb across his cheekbone. It is one of Will’s favourite gestures, a simple but tender show of affection, and he tilts his face into the contact.

‘Thought you were already inside my head, Dr Lecter,’ he replies. Hannibal’s eyes gleam.

‘I can assure you, Will; when I am in your head, you will know.’

Before he can say anything else, the Chairwoman corners them again, bringing with her a trio of silver-haired Alpha males, two with docile, decorated little Omegas on their arms. Will refuses to look at them for fear of snarling; they are the epitome of well-bred trophy wives, all glossy hair and gentle smiles, their glittering necklaces cut low at the back to show off their crests. They stand close to their mates, staring up with adoring expressions as the Alphas casually drape possessive arms around their bare shoulders. His stomach clenches and he gulps down a second glass of champagne, ignoring the way his skin itches to be closer to Hannibal. *Stupid, weak biology*.

‘It’s been too long since you’ve properly cooked for us, Hannibal,’ Madam Chairwoman says, earning a general flutter of agreement from her companions. Her tone is teasingly scolding, and Will can see the amusement on Hannibal’s face. *He’s toying with these people.* The realisation is a sharp jolt, though Will isn’t sure why he’s surprised. Hannibal is the perfect gentleman… *But there’s something else… Something… Darker… A wolf among the sheep*, Will thinks. He can see it in the way that Hannibal holds himself, guards himself; never giving away his secrets. He can’t truly be himself around them.

I want you to show me who you really are…

‘Come over and I will cook for you,’ Hannibal says, wrapping an arm around Will enough to stroke between his shoulder blades. Will buries his face in his champagne flute to hide the blush and whimper that wants to betray how much he enjoys the touch.

Madam Chairwoman places her hands on her hips.

‘I said “properly”; means dinner *and* the show.’ She turns to the other Alphas. ‘Have you seen him cook? It’s an entire performance.’

Will glances up at Hannibal; he's seen him cook and been hosted by him several times now, but this sounds special. His eyes gleam at the idea of Hannibal impressing the snobs here before dismissing them and fucking him, brutally hard and fast, with teeth and nails and blood, in front of the fireplace in the dining room.

Hannibal takes a long drink of champagne to distract himself from the tang of slick sharpening Will's scent; he smells good enough to eat, good enough to fuck here in the middle of Baltimore high society. He wants to yank him close and devour him… *Wherever* could the Omega's mind be wandering to…?

'He used to throw such exquisite dinner parties,' Madam Chairwoman continues, raising her eyebrows at him when Hannibal feigns ignorance. 'You heard me. "Used to".'

Hannibal smiles at her persistence.

'And I will again, once inspiration strikes,' he says. The Chairwoman smiles, but it fades to a pout when Hannibal adds, 'I cannot force a feast; a feast must present itself.'

'It's a dinner party, not a unicorn,' she whines. Will is surprised she doesn't stamp her foot, but Hannibal merely shrugs, dipping his hand lower to settle in the small of Will's back.

'Oh, but the feast is life,' he says. 'You put the life in your belly and you live.'

Will feels his own stomach tighten, even as heat rolls through him. *Life in my belly means a baby…* His heart skips a beat at the idea, but it's not as terrifying a thought as it used to be. He drinks more champagne as he tries to understand when his aversion to having children changed… Certainly recently… Since Hannibal started fucking him? *Would I have a child with Hannibal…?*

The Chairwoman relents with a chuckle and turns instead to the Beta hovering at the edges of their group.

'I *believe* this young man is trying to get your attention,' she says, though this is a gross understatement, since the man is fidgeting, almost pushing at them with nervous excitement. The collar of his tuxedo dampens with sweat and a big grin lights up his plump face when he is noticed. Will frowns, dragged from thoughts of family; he's the same person who was staring at Hannibal throughout the show, leaning over his taller companion to catch Hannibal's attention.

The taller man sends a chill down Will's spine. He is an Alpha, and there is an air about him that vaguely reminds him of Hannibal, though he has none of his warmth; his eyes are like chips of black ice ringed with red, and he stares with unashamed hunger at Will, causing Hannibal's shoulders to tense. Will can feel himself shrink under the intensity of the gaze, even as his dark shadow hisses, writhing at the unspoken challenge. This man is dangerous, and he is a threat that Will wants to eliminate.

Hannibal shifts himself slightly in front of Will, shielding him from the Alpha, and offers the excited Beta a polite, neutral, smile.

‘Hello.’

‘Hi. It’s *so* good to see you,’ the Beta gushes, almost falling over himself to shake with Hannibal. He gestures to his partner. ‘This is my friend, Tobias.’

Despite his wariness, Will almost snorts – *friend*. They are clearly partners, and *Tobias* doesn’t look best pleased at being referred to as a *friend*, especially when his Beta is flirting shamelessly with another, stronger Alpha. Because Hannibal *is* the stronger Alpha; he’s perhaps the strongest Alpha in the room. As an Omega, Will can sense the power radiating from them all. Hannibal is tall and lean; there are others far bulkier, but none of them have within them the same maelstrom of passion and power that his Alpha does. Will’s darkness croons for it to be released, to rage wild and free… He lifts his free hand and mimics his partner’s stance by placing it on the small of Hannibal’s back, comforting him and continuing the contact because Hannibal has to release him to shake with the newcomers.

‘Good evening,’ Hannibal says, extending his hand towards Tobias. The younger Alpha grips him tight; an overt display of dominance, and stares deep into Hannibal’s eyes. Only Will’s hand on his back keeps Hannibal’s rage under check; the Omega’s scent is smooth and soft, releasing calming pheromones that put everyone at ease. The Beta looks awkwardly from Hannibal to Tobias, sensing some tension but not sure why.

Madam Chairwoman smiles, attempting polite conversation.

‘How do you two know each other?’ she asks, and the Beta immediately looks to Hannibal for guidance.

‘There should remain some mystery to my life outside of the opera,’ Hannibal says swiftly. The Chairwoman smiles, though there is a tightness to her lips betraying her frustration. The Beta leans forwards.

‘I’m one of his patients,’ he explains, and Will feels a sudden, painful kick in his gut, so strong that he pulls his hand away from Hannibal and knocks back the last of his champagne. *Oh God… Am I like this man? Nothing more than a needy, over-bearing, clingy patient?*

‘Oh,’ the Chairwoman says, and Will watches the interest fade from her eyes. He sees Hannibal’s irritation behind his façade and he feels sick.

Hannibal turns his attention to the taller Alpha. The loss of Will’s touch is painful; he wants to be alone with him, to soothe whatever distress is causing Will to shrink from him. Instead, he is trapped here, with these *pigs*.

‘Did you enjoy the performance?’ he asks lightly. Tobias inclines his head, though his cold eyes continue to flicker from his partner to Will to Hannibal. It is the Beta, however, who answers.

‘I *did*. I *loved* it. Every *minute*.’

‘His eyes kept wandering,’ Tobias says stiffly. ‘More interested in you than what was happening on stage.’

Will can *feel* the energy crackling beneath Hannibal's skin. The Alpha is preparing for a fight, and, despite his worry, his shadow purrs its approval at the idea. Hannibal, however, accepts the comment as if it is a polite joke.

'Oh, don't say too much,' he teases. 'You must leave something for us to discuss next week.' He turns to the Beta. 'Franklyn, good to see you.'

And, just like that, they have been dismissed. Will can almost *see* the walls between them. He can certainly feel them; icy and impenetrable. Hannibal is very private, and he keeps his professional and personal lives very separate. *Where do I fit, then?*

'You too,' the Beta says, smiling sadly because he, too, can tell that his time with Hannibal at the opera is over, brief though it was.

Hannibal shakes with Franklyn's partner again, forcing him to turn his wrist when Tobias doesn't remove his cold, hungry stare from Will's defiant, golden one.

'Tobias.'

He watches them leave and slips his arm back around Will's waist, holding him close and dipping his head to soothe himself with the scent of Will's curls. A low purr rattles his chest and Will instinctively tilts his head enough that Hannibal can see his pulse. The submissive gesture calms him, and when he turns back to the Chairwoman and waiting Alphas in her company, he smiles genially.

'Who's hungry?'

The joke breaks the unease and their pleasant, if a little stiff, conversation resumes. Hannibal neatly deflects any questions about Will, keeping his arm loose around the Omega's waist and releasing him as soon as Will steps away to use the bathroom. Alone with just the Alpha, the Chairwoman leans closer so that they can both watch Will cut a path through the crowd, and says conspiratorially,

'He really *is* very impressive, Hannibal. We were all afraid you were going to be a confirmed bachelor forever.'

Hannibal smiles around a fresh glass of champagne.

'I only hope he accepts my claim, when it comes to it,' he says, tilting his head knowingly at the bonded Alphas and their Omega mates. The Chairwoman scoffs.

'Of course he will,' she says, waving a dismissive hand. 'Why wouldn't he? Especially at *his* age.' She looks off in the direction that Will has gone, and misses the way Hannibal's eyes tighten. 'Personally, I wouldn't let him out of my *sight*, let alone *work*.' She giggles and smooths her dark hair from her face. 'But to each their own. I'm sure you know what's best for him.'

'I trust Will to look after himself,' Hannibal says simply. He turns away and places his empty flute on a passing tray before he crushes the stem. 'However, I do believe it's time for us to

go.'

'Of course,' Madam Chairwoman says, her eyes glinting when Will comes back and automatically tips his head towards Hannibal's shoulder before leaning up for a kiss. His eyes are heavily ringed with gold and he smells *divine*, like vanilla musk and earth. He must be due a heat, with the way he reacts so strongly to the Alpha. No wonder Hannibal is so protective. She holds a hand up so that he can kiss her knuckles. 'Hannibal, I expect a dinner invitation soon. Mr Graham, a pleasure to meet you.'

Hannibal obliges her, inclining his head to brush his lips over the back of the silk glove. He nods to the other Alphas and takes Will by the hand. The Omega is sweating now, his cheeks flushed pink and curls darkening near his forehead and neck. His skin is feverishly hot, and he walks very close to Hannibal's side as they leave the theatre, trying to nuzzle his shoulder to soak up his scent.

The cold night air is refreshing on his damp skin and Will lifts his face to the stars when they get outside, his breath billowing when he sighs. He feels *alive* and exhausted at the same time, and all he wants to do is quiet the storm in his mind.

'Well, that was… educational,' he says, and he forces a grin when Hannibal chuckles. Despite his concern, he can't help but step closer, snuggling into his Alpha's chest and pressing burning kisses to Hannibal's jawline. 'But I'd like to go home now.'

'Home?' Hannibal teases, holding Will's chin between forefinger and thumb. 'To Wolf Trap?'

Will's stomach tightens with fear and he growls at him. He twists his fingers in the silky soft hair at the back of Hannibal's head and drags him down for a hungry kiss, sucking the Alpha's tongue into his mouth and then fucking Hannibal's mouth with his own. He arches his spine, sweat dribbling down to settle in the small of his back as slick oozes out of him at the taste and smell of the other man.

Hannibal groans into the hungry kiss, his hips jumping when Will's tongue slips between his teeth to explore him. He threads his fingers through Will's thick curls, massaging his scalp and making Will moan. His Omega is upset about something, so when Will breaks the kiss to drop his head back and bare his throat, Hannibal doesn't resist the urge to lock his teeth around the front of his windpipe in a show of overwhelming dominance.

Fuck… This… This is perfect… Don't let me think… Will grips tight to Hannibal's coat as he feels the Alpha's teeth denting the soft, vulnerable skin of his throat. He whines, begging for mercy, surrendering to Hannibal's strength and to the feelings in his body, and heat crackles across the nape of his neck.

'Hannibal…' he gasps, his knees wobbling when the Alpha releases him. He falls into the embrace when Hannibal wraps an arm around his waist, and returns Hannibal's fresh kiss just as fiercely, stumbling as they make their way towards the car. Hannibal shoves him up against the passenger door, knocking the air from him, and Will spreads his legs so that the Alpha can rub his erection against his own hardness.

‘You’re mine,’ Hannibal whispers, his eyes burning red. He pushes his nose into Will’s cheek, rasping his tongue across his stubble. Will shivers, closing honey-gold eyes and resting his head against the roof of the car.

‘Hannibal…’

‘Say it, Will.’ Hannibal nibbles at his jawline, spreading one broad palm across Will’s flat stomach, sliding it lower until it’s tantalisingly close to his groin. Will whines and squirms up towards the touch, stilling when Hannibal holds him in a choke and stares deep into his eyes. ‘*Who do you belong to?*’

Will’s heart thunders in his chest. He swallows, feeling the pressure of Hannibal’s hand, and liquid fire pools in his belly, bubbling with nerves and excitement at the hungry glint to the Alpha’s burgundy eyes. *I’m not imagining this; I’m not like Franklyn. You like me, maybe something more…*

‘You,’ he breathes, sliding his hands up Hannibal’s sides. ‘I belong to you…’ He waits until Hannibal relaxes his grip, satisfied with the answer, and then he grabs the Alpha by each side of his head, shoving up from the car and twisting so that the taller man is the one pinned. He slams his mouth against Hannibal’s, tasting blood when his lip splits. ‘And *you* belong to *me*,’ he growls.

Hannibal sucks in a breath when Will releases him. He stares down at the Omega, at burning gold eyes and bared teeth, and feels a thrill run down his spine. He dips his head and places a last, lingering kiss on Will’s forehead.

‘I do.’

Will presses closer, rubbing his nose into the crook of Hannibal’s throat, resting his lips over his Alpha’s stuttering pulse.

‘Take me home, Hannibal,’ he whispers. ‘*Now*.’

Hannibal nods, and hurries to unlock the car. Will falls into the passenger seat, grinding his ass down on the chair as his insides clench, aching with emptiness. He arches his back, sweaty fingers fumbling to undo his bowtie and unbutton his shirt. Hannibal growls at the display, driving fast to get Will home before he loses all semblance of self-control.

‘Hannibal…’ Will whimpers, sweat darkening his hair, rolling like tears down the sides of his face. Hannibal reaches over and presses a hand flat to the Omega’s heaving chest, feeling Will’s heart battering against the skin beneath. He hushes him, soothing him with low purrs as he turns onto his street. They both scramble from the car before the engine dies, grabbing at coats and jackets and shirts in a rush to get at the flesh beneath.

As soon as they’re inside, Hannibal slides his hands through Will’s damp curls, pulling him up for a kiss as he toes off his shoes. He twists the lock on the front door to make sure nobody disturbs them and then gathers Will up in his arms, almost lifting him from the floor as he swings him around and slams him up against the wall. A side table rocks as Will’s hip knocks against the edge; the Omega growls at the pain and kicks out at the offending

furniture, knocking a vase to the floor. Neither of them stop at the sound of smashing china; Hannibal rips Will's tuxedo jacket down to his elbows, pinning his arms to his sides, and nudges Will's chin up, forcing him to bare his throat again. He sucks at the salty flesh underneath Will's ear, deftly undoing the last buttons of the Omega's shirt and spreading it wide so that he can slide his hands across Will's chest and stomach.

'Oh *God*...' Hannibal's touch is burning him, and Will struggles to breathe when the Alpha finally releases his mouth. He feels like he's drowning but it feels so *good*… He wriggles to free his arms, whining and snarling in frustration when the material sticks to his sweaty skin, trapping him. 'Hannibal, *Hannibal*, please…' He thumps his head back when the Alpha drops scorching kisses to his collarbone, to the fine hairs over his chest, sucking a hard nipple into his mouth and squeezing between his teeth, just hard enough to hurt. Will closes his eyes and rolls his hips. He's so slick, so open… He needs Hannibal *inside* him, *now*… He groans at the ache between his legs, curling his hands into trembling fists because he's restrained, pinned by Hannibal's roaming hands and teasing mouth, and all he wants to do is fuck until he comes, again and again and again.

Hannibal grins at Will's desperation. He drops to his knees, staring up with red-ringed eyes, nodding when Will shakes his head.

'I want to taste you, Will,' he says, already unzipping Will's trousers and reaching for his boxers. He pulls them both down Will's creamy thighs, stroking the soft hairs and pale skin revealed as the fine wool whispers down to pool at Will's feet. His Omega is the perfect image of debauchery; clothes hanging from him, muscles tight and glistening with sweat, his cheeks flushed pink and eyes burning with gold fire. He's so hard it looks painful, twitching and leaking pre-cum, his balls hanging heavy beneath. Hannibal licks his lips, savouring Will's musk. It is thicker now, warmer and richer the closer he gets to heat.

Will shudders when the Alpha's slides his mouth around his length, taking him whole and then releasing him to lick and tease at his sensitive tip. He scratches his nails against the marble behind him, locking his knees so as not to fall when he spreads his legs as wide as the trousers will let him go. *Fuck*… He could come just from this, right now, but Hannibal doesn't have him down his throat and he doesn't want to spill himself on the Alpha's face. He gasps when Hannibal grazes him with his teeth, groaning as a strong hand cups and massages his balls, gathering up hot slick and coating two fingers. His sounds of pleasure turn into a desperate sob and he can't help but buck when Hannibal plunges those two fingers inside him, bending the knuckles to stroke white pleasure from him.

Hannibal pushes Will's hips back into the wall with his free hand so that the Omega can't jerk forwards a second time, repeating the motion inside his body. He takes Will into his mouth again, sucking and licking and kissing as he presses down hard, over and over, with his fingers.

Oh fuck... oh fuck... He can't move, can't think, can't breathe, can't feel anything but Hannibal's hot, wet mouth around him and the Alpha's fingers *inside* him, brushing *that* spot until the pleasure is like a wave, coming closer and closer, winding him up and up until he's going to break. And then it's too much and he's tipping over the edge, coming with a muffled cry, his thighs shaking when it goes on and on. It's so good, so clean and pure and *right* and

Hannibal is still moving inside him, swallowing his release down before smirking up at him as he digs deeper inside Will's body because there's just so much *more* that Will can give him. And Will's eyes are open, he can *see* Hannibal's burgundy gaze, see the sandy hair falling over his forehead, the pearly stain in the corner of his mouth and his smile, *so* proud and loving, like Will is the most beautiful thing he's ever seen.

'That's it, Will,' Hannibal whispers, staring up at his Omega, his chest too tight to breathe, his hand coated with slick to his wrist as he works the Will's body to another climax. 'Come for me again, you can do it.'

Will convulses, tears rolling down his cheeks at how *good* it feels. He can't… he can't… But he *can*. He can't stop it, and his mind shatters as every muscle tightens. He can hear his heart, roaring in his ears, and all he can see, all he can smell and feel is Hannibal. He comes with another sharp cry, spilling himself on his stomach and Hannibal's shoulder, falling forwards into Hannibal's arms when the Alpha stands up, supporting him as his knees buckle. Hannibal's strong arms come around his waist, holding him close as he shakes against him, a slick-damp hand on his quivering backside, the Alpha's free hand cradling the back of his head.

Hannibal hugs Will tight, showering his forehead and temples with soft kisses as Will judders against him. He helps the Omega remove his shoes and socks, supporting him when Will steps out of his trousers and shrugs out of the shirt and jacket until he is perfectly naked, and then he cups Will's chin so that he can give him a long, slow kiss. The sweet taste of him, the salty sweat and tears and the earthy, coppery tang of his bloody lips makes his stomach clench. He groans at how hard he is, how sweet the pain of the ache is, and removes his own jacket before stepping back.

'I want you to run, Will,' he says calmly. He doesn't miss the way his Omega's breath catches, and he parts his lips to savour the tang of Will's fear. Removes his cufflinks and begins to unbutton his shirt as he speaks. 'I'm going to chase you, and I'm going to catch you.'

Will quivers. He's taut with nerves but humming with excitement, and he can feel his body pulse another trickle of slick down his thighs at the idea of Hannibal hunting him. He nods, keeping his gold eyes on the predatory Alpha as he backs away towards the stairs. He fumbles behind him, catching hold of the banister for balance as he begins to climb, very slowly so as not to trigger the Alpha's urge to pounce.

Hannibal's groin twinges and he bares his teeth, holding himself back as Will carefully retreats from him, still facing him, waiting… *Any moment*...

Now. Will turns his back on Hannibal and darts forwards, his heart thundering and adrenaline pumping when he hears the Alpha race after him. He dashes across the landing and throws himself into the master bedroom, slamming the door shut onto the Alpha's arm as Hannibal catches up because he's just so *fast*. Hannibal's snarl rips the air and then his stronger body is slamming into the wood, knocking Will back, and he's *on* him, grabbing him by the throat and throwing him onto the bed. The mattress sinks under their weight and all the air leaves Will in a rush as Hannibal pins him, his eyes blazing red. *Fuck*… It's hot and scary as hell.

Will whimpers, spreading his thighs and rubbing up to please the Alpha, rolling his head back and baring his throat. *You caught me. I'm yours*. *Please don't hurt me*.

Hannibal can't speak; his heart is racing, his body pulsing with fire. All he wants to do is bury himself deep inside his Omega, fill him with his seed and knot him, bite him and scar him and mark him. *Mine. Mine, mine, mine.*

Will grabs for Hannibal's trousers to help the Alpha, and something rips as two sets of hands shove at the fabric until Hannibal's length is freed. God; Will's almost panting with how much he wants it. He wants it all. He's dizzy with it, drunk with it. His dark shadow pulses and he scratches bloody welts into the Alpha's arms, baring his teeth up at him when Hannibal squeezes his hips hard enough to bruise.

Hannibal growls again and flips Will onto his stomach, mouthing at the burning nape of his neck. The patch of red skin is silky smooth and spicy, begging for him to bite it, to scar it into a crest. He groans at the pain of resisting, and vents his frustration by tearing into Will's shoulder, instead, spilling crimson blood over Will's skin.

'Fuck!' Will rocks back, lifting his ass to present for Hannibal. He can hear himself crying, his breath catching with helpless little whimpers as the Alpha lines himself up and then begins to push inside. It's so good, so tight, so *perfect* and the stretch almost hurts, it's almost too much but it's still not enough because Hannibal hasn't bonded him. Will clenches his jaw, slamming himself back to take the Alpha's full length, reaching behind him to stop Hannibal from pulling away. 'No… don't stop, please… *God*, don't stop.'

Hannibal mouths at the bloody crater in Will's shoulder muscle, sucking down the coppery taste of him as he rocks his hips, burying himself as deep inside the Omega's body as he can. It's so hot, so tight. Will pulses around him, rippling muscles and tingling slick coaxing him to knot. Hannibal screws his eyes shut and bites down again, deepening the wound as he ruts into Will, fucking him hard and fast. Will writhes beneath him, mewling cries muffled by the quilt when Hannibal shoves his head down, forcing him to bare the back of his neck. *You're mine, Will. Every part of you, mine*.

He comes hard, blood running down his chin as he arches his back, locking his elbows and pouring his seed into Will's body. He shudders when Will comes around him, tightening into a vice around his swelling knot, sealing them together, and gasps hard enough to spray flecks of red across the other man's back.

Will trembles, crushed by Hannibal's weight, grey spots dancing behind his eyelids and his ears ringing at the strength of the orgasm. *Fuck*… He shifts, his body so boneless and heavy that he could sink right into the bed. Pain makes him gasp, and he reaches for his throbbing shoulder, eyes widening when he sees the amount of blood on his fingers.

'Hannibal…'

Hannibal purrs and kisses the bite mark, planting a line of kisses until he can brush his lips across the jagged scar between Will's shoulder blades, rubbing up and down the Omega's arms to soothe him when Will whines.

‘You almost sent me into rut,’ the Alpha says softly, his voice hoarse from snarling. ‘I’m sorry I hurt you.’

‘I’m okay,’ Will whispers. He turns his head, resting his cheek on the damp covers so that he can look back at Hannibal. He smiles sleepily, purring at the feel of Hannibal’s chest hair against his bare back. ‘Mmm… That was *really* good.’

Hannibal hums his agreement. He dips his head and kisses Will’s scar again, frowning when the Omega tenses beneath him.

‘How did you get this, Will? Have you been Cut?’ he asks, surprised by the fist of ice in his stomach at the idea of it; at the idea of how much *pain* it would have caused Will to have a crest sliced out of him… Omegas have *died* from the shock of it.

‘No.’ Will swallows the lump in his throat and reaches for Hannibal’s hand, twining his fingers with the Alpha and pressing his nose to Hannibal’s skin so that he can ground himself with his scent. ‘I did it to myself.’

Hannibal is quiet for a long time, and Will waits for his throat to loosen. He will tell him… he will… just… He swallows again, but Hannibal speaks before he can try to force the words out.

‘Another time, perhaps. You should sleep now.’

Will blinks through a haze of tears, his chest in a vice. He manages a quick nod and presses a shaky kiss to Hannibal’s knuckles.

‘Thank you,’ he whispers.

Hannibal leans down and kisses Will’s temple, stroking through his hair until the Omega can’t help but purr. He smiles into Will’s skin, adjusting his weight so as not to crush the smaller man beneath him.

‘We all have our secrets,’ he murmurs, resting his head near Will’s to share breath with him when they sleep. ‘Perhaps, one day, we can share them with each other.’

***

Two nights later, Jack wakes Will from dreams of concrete dust and oil to drive him to a waking nightmare. They found a victim in a hotel room bathtub, missing a kidney and chest split wide as though trying to get at his heart.

Zeller is adamant it’s the Chesapeake Ripper – there are a lot of similarities, but *everything* in Will’s gut screams that this is someone else.

‘We’ve got twenty-two signature components all attributable to the same killer,’ Zeller says, taking up the bathroom doorway where Jack has exiled them so that Will can do what he does, undisturbed.

Will frowns from where he's sat, slumped on the toilet lid because the memories in the room are *fresh*, just like Jack promised, and he got sucked in so completely that he can *feel* the killer's exhaustion. His *grief* and regret… *You weren't supposed to die*, he thinks, looking over at the corpse in the bathtub. *You just didn't need two kidneys, and someone else needed it.*

'Twenty-two *possible* signature components,' he says, pushing himself to his feet. Zeller scoffs a laugh.

'It's the Ripper,' he says, huffing when Will shuts the door in his face.

Will sits back down on the toilet, his gaze distant. Jack braces himself against the wall on the other side of the bathroom. His shoulders are broad with tension, and he clenches his blue-gloved hand into a fist.

'Are you sure?' he asks quietly, and Will nods.

'More or less.'

'Tell me why you're sure,' Jack says, staring down at the not-Ripper victim in the tub. Will swallows, choosing his words carefully.

'The Ripper left a victim in a church pew using his *tongue* as a page marker in the Bible he was holding,' he says. He chews his lip and shakes his head. *It doesn't feel the same*. 'This isn't that; this is a medical student, or a trainee, or someone trying to make an extra buck in a back-alley surgery and it went bad. *Actively* bad.'

Disappointment rolls from Jack and Will bows his head because he *knows* how much this means to the Alpha, how much it hurts to realise he's not going to get him today.

'We'll catch the Ripper,' he says softly. 'Eventually.'

'Yeah, well I wanna catch him *now*,' Jack growls. 'When I do, you're not gonna get a chance to shoot him, 'cos *I'm* gonna do that.' He sinks to a crouch beside the bathtub.

'You can't just jack up the law and get underneath it,' Will says.

'Can't I?' Jack asks, turning from the victim to raise his eyebrows at him. Will has his head back, trying to stretch the knots from his shoulders, but he lowers his chin so that he's no longer baring his throat to the Alpha, and Jack sighs. He frowns at the victim and then back at him. 'Tell me how you *see* the Ripper, Will.'

Will's darkness washes through him, warm and comforting, purring through his chest. *I see him as a god*, he thinks, flushing with warm pride before his brain gathers up his shadow and stuffs it away inside the cage in the back of his mind. *No… That's not how I see him… it's not…* Aloud, he says,

'I see him as one of those… *pitiful*… *things* sometimes born in hospitals… They… feed it, keep it warm… but they don't put it on the machines… They let it die. But he doesn't die. He… *looks* normal… Nobody can tell what he is.'

He sighs. Squeezes the bridge of his nose and shrugs at Jack. He's tired, and he just wants to go home. To Hannibal.

My Alpha.

'Are we done?' he asks, and Jack sighs again.

'Yeah, we're done.'

Will nods, and heads outside for some fresh air. His head is killing him; he knocks back a heat suppressant, his stomach twisting with guilt as soon as he realises he's *grateful* that he no longer needs to collect them from Hannibal. He doesn't want to see him right now. After meeting Franklyn at the opera, after sensing Hannibal's irritation with him, Will can't shake the worry that the Alpha only sees him as a patient, that fucking him is a way of helping him, albeit an *unorthodox* way of treating him… Because, really, what does he have to offer him? He's hardly mating material; too dark, too twisted… *Too broken*… He's not even from good breeding stock, and he's already said he doesn't want a family…

He can convince himself that Hannibal wants him as more than just a patient when they're fucking, but that doesn't mean anything… Hannibal has this way of *overwhelming* his reason until he might as well be in heat, but the rest of the time…

He glares down at an oil-slick puddle between his feet, narrowing his eyes against the gold he can still see in his irises.

Why do I feel like you're holding something back, Hannibal?

***

At twenty-eight minutes past seven on Thursday, Hannibal opens his office door to greet Will for their scheduled session. His chest tightens a fraction at the sight of his Omega; his delicate musk is deadened by the new suppressants, barely detectable beneath remnants of the day's Beta spray, and when he turns, his eyes are a deep blue with barely a thin ring of dark gold.

Will's heart skips a beat at the sight of his Alpha. *Fuck*… This is going to be hard. Hannibal looks good today; dark suit, burgundy shirt and matching tie… His insides pulse and he feels the first hint of slick dampen his ass cheeks in response to the other man's musk.

'Good evening, Will,' Hannibal says warmly. He steps back, welcoming him into his office. 'Please, come in.'

Will forces a wobbly smile and ducks inside, keeping his eyes on the floor so that he can't be distracted with Hannibal as his Alpha closes the door, sealing them in the room together. He notices a glass of rosé on Hannibal's side table as he shrugs out of his jacket, and frowns.

'You've been drinking,' he says, somewhat accusingly.

'I had a glass of wine with my last appointment, yes,' Hannibal says, taking his time returning to his armchair and watching as Will drapes his coat over the chaise lounge. His

Omega is tense, his scent souring every few notes.

‘Drinking with a *patient*’? Will mutters. *Unorthodox… but not as bad as fucking one.*

‘*She* was drinking with a patient,’ Hannibal corrects. He sits down and crosses one long leg over the other. ‘I have an unconventional psychiatrist.’

‘Well, we have that in common,’ Will mumbles. He fidgets for a moment and then sinks into his armchair, instinctively resting back into the deep seat with his legs spread and hands on the armrests so that Hannibal can see all of his chest and stomach. Open and trusting. But Hannibal cannot take satisfaction in the position, because there is something in Will’s words, in the guarded tone, that make him uneasy.

‘*Am* I your psychiatrist?’ he asks, his gut twisting at the idea of it. ‘Or are we simply have conversations?’

Will looks at him, tension thrumming through him. *A partner shouldn’t psychoanalyse me the way you do… But a psychiatrist shouldn’t fuck me…*

‘”*Yes”*, I think is the answer to that,’ he says, clenching his jaw because he really isn’t sure *exactly* what Hannibal expects from him. He’s not even sure *Hannibal* knows what he expects from him.

Hannibal considers him – Will can sense the imbalance of power in their relationship, and he resents it, still. He may always. Is that all this is? He inclines his head.

‘Then having a glass of wine before seeing a patient, I assure you, is very conventional,’ he says, rising to fetch a second glass from the cupboard. ‘*Especially* for evening appointments.’

Will watches him, watches the way Hannibal’s shoulders move in his suit jacket and the way the silk trousers stroke his thighs when he walks… He shifts, his insides aching with emptiness. Tries to distract himself by looking around the familiar room.

‘How long have you been seeing a psychiatrist?’ he asks.

‘Since I chose to be a psychiatrist,’ Hannibal replies. He uncorks the wine and pours Will a small glass; he’s driving after all, and Omegas are known for having a lower alcohol tolerance. He can feel Will’s gaze on him the whole time; big eyes, vulnerable face… He gives him a small smile as he hands the glass to him. Will so desperately wants to be close to him; he can smell the sharp tang of his slick, but he is also nervous, almost as jittery as the first time they met…

‘Thank you,’ Will mutters, accepting the glass without touching the Alpha. He sniffs and takes a sip. It’s good; crisp and clean. Not like the red wine he usually drinks.

Hannibal sits again, unbuttoning his jacket for comfort. He needs to warm Will up, to get him talking about the case before he steers the conversation to their relationship. Something is clearly bothering him.

‘I read the Freddy Lounds article,’ he says. ‘The Chesapeake Ripper has struck again.’

Will shakes his head.

‘No, no, no, it’s not the same guy,’ he says, and all the tension from the crime scene rushes back into him, adding to his own electric current to propel him to his feet.

‘Maybe it’s never *been* the same guy,’ Hannibal suggests, watching him pace.

‘Oh, what, now *he* has a friend?’ Will gives a sarcastic chuckle. *Great… We all have friends… Friends together, nothing more…* He looks away from Hannibal to stare at the curtains; he *can’t* look at him right now.

‘Any variations in the murders that might suggest more than one Ripper?’ Hannibal asks, trying to ground Will in the case. In the violence.

‘Er, some variations,’ Will says.

Hannibal takes a slow drink of his wine, choosing his words carefully. He sits forwards.

‘The victims were all brutalised. What was the brutalisation hiding?’ he asks.

‘The careful, *surgical* removal and preservation of vital organs,’ Will replies.

‘*Valuable* organs,’ Hannibal says lightly.

Will considers, and then frowns.

‘Organ *harvesters*?’

Seed planted, Hannibal sits back again.

‘Jack’s looking for a serial killer he can’t seem to catch,’ he says. ‘It’s a brilliant diversion.’

Will raises his eyebrows, his eyes darting back and forth as he tries to make it stick. It makes sense, but it doesn’t *feel* quite right… then again, *nothing* feels quite right at the moment. He sighs.

‘Interesting theory,’ he says. ‘I will keep it in mind if another body drops.’ He takes a gulp of wine to settle his shaking voice.

‘Please do,’ Hannibal says, and he smiles. ‘Now. Are you going to tell me why you are so tense?’

Will scoffs and looks at him. Hannibal looks back, holding the gaze until Will gives in and shrugs, eyes lowered to the ground.

‘Nothing… the case, it’s just…’ He gives up on the lie before it’s even finished, and rubs the back of his neck, hissing when his thumb catches his nape. ‘Franklyn,’ he admits quietly, not quite daring to meet Hannibal’s gaze again. ‘He made me think… made me *question*…’

Hannibal schools his expression to neutrality, despite the urge to snarl, to let his eyes glow red and bite into Will until he knows, in *every fibre* of his being, that he is *nothing* like Franklyn. He is nothing like *anyone*, and he belongs to *Hannibal*.

'What are you questioning, Will?' he asks quietly, and his heart skips a beat at the sad, frightened little whimper that catches in his mate's throat. He can't go to him, not yet. Will needs to accept his claim without his judgement impaired by the cloud of heat hormones.

'You,' Will whispers, speaking down to his wine glass. 'Your… *intentions*.'

Will is trembling now, and his scent is salty with fear. He's worried that he's angered Hannibal, and he is already tilting his head to the side, baring his throat in a placating gesture of submission, just in case. Hannibal sighs, but stays where he is.

'I have only ever intended to help you, Will,' he says gently. 'I want you to realise your true potential.'

'As my friend, or as my psychiatrist?' Will mutters, eyes still fixed on his wineglass.

Hannibal represses a growl, but barely, and it roughens his voice when he speaks.

'As your *mate*,' he says. He raises his eyebrow as Will lifts his head to look at him, and the Omega flushes with desire, sweet musk pouring from him as his eyes flicker gold. 'You asked me if that was what I wanted. I've given it a great deal of consideration, and I do.' He gets to his feet and takes the wine glass from Will's hand, puts it on the side table and pulls Will's arms around his waist so that the Omega is hugging him. Then he takes hold of each side of Will's face, lifting his head until the other man meets his gaze. 'I want you.'

Will sucks in his breath, shivering at Hannibal's words. He searches the Alpha's face for any trace of doubt, of hesitation, but there's only desire and something softer, something vulnerable… He swallows and nods.

'I want you, too,' he whispers. 'I want to earn it.'

Hannibal smiles and dips his head, placing an achingly gentle kiss to Will's lips.

'I can't wait.'

'And when I do?' Will asks, stepping closer so that he can rub up against Hannibal's body. Being close to him, touching him… it feels so *right*. He's missed him so much this week… 'Will you let me see who you really are?'

'I don't think I'll be able to stop you,' Hannibal says, stroking his hands up and down Will's back, feeling the muscles begin to relax under his touch. 'When you're ready, you'll know me.'

'You don't think I'm ready?' Will murmurs, tilting his head so that Hannibal can kiss his pulse. 'You don't trust me?'

‘I find it difficult to trust anyone,’ Hannibal replies. He begins to unbutton Will’s shirt, still nuzzling and kissing the Omega’s jaw, cheeks and neck as he drops the ugly, checked shirt to the floor. Will shivers when cool air brushes over his burning skin, his eyes slipping shut as Hannibal spreads a hand over his stomach, the other coming up to brush past his scar, teasing at the edge of his nape until he’s so hard it hurts.

‘We have trust issues in common as well,’ he manages, gasping when Hannibal’s fingers *finally* touch where his crest should be. ‘*Hannibal*…’

Hannibal gives in to him and grips him tight by the back of the neck, sending shockwaves of pleasure through his body. He walks Will towards the couch and turns him, pushing him to lie face down on the padded leather. Will obeys, soft and weak as a kitten, and rolls his face to the side so that he can still see his Alpha. Hannibal purrs and Will trembles, whimpering a plea as he lifts up to present for him.

‘Very good, Will,’ Hannibal says, massaging the pressure points to make Will pliant. He releases him for just long enough to finish undressing him, stepping back to admire his Omega’s naked body. Muscles ripple as Will squirms, slick glistening between his quivering buttocks and twitching thighs. He whines for Hannibal to come back, a hand scrabbling for him and clutching tight to Hannibal’s trouser leg when the Alpha stands beside him and reaches down to pin him by the neck again.

‘Hannibal… *please*…’ Will isn’t even sure what he’s begging for; if he wants Hannibal to fuck him, knot him, bite him or just keep touching his neck. He just knows it’s *good*, it’s so good and so right and he needs this, he needs Hannibal *so* much…

‘Sssh,’ Hannibal whispers. He leans down and brushes Will’s hair from his sweaty forehead, checking his eyes. They are resolutely blue, but the pupils are blown wide and Will’s body is flushing a delicate shake of pink as he slips towards another prodromal phase brought on by Hannibal’s manipulation. As much as his scent is deadened, the signs are there for Hannibal to read, and he nuzzles Will’s cheek as he speaks into his ear. ‘That’s it, let yourself go. No more doubts.’

Will purrs when Hannibal speaks; he can’t really understand the words, but his Alpha’s tone is soothing. He spreads his legs, nodding his thanks when Hannibal helps him tuck his knees under him, lifting up to present for the other man. *Please… please…*

‘You’re mine, Will,’ Hannibal says calmly, removing his suit jacket and folding it carefully over the back of his chair. Seeing his Omega hold position, exposed and vulnerable to the world, ready for Hannibal to mount… He purrs again, fumbling with his cufflinks and placing them beside his abandoned wine. ‘Can you say it for me?’

‘M’yours,’ Will mumbles, scratching at the leather, trying to hold on despite the fire raging inside him. He whines, the cool air above him shivering as his temperature spikes, whimpering when pleasure zings up his spine and fresh slick trickles down his legs. ‘Hannibal… *Hannibal…*’

‘I’m here,’ Hannibal says, undoing his tie and removing his waistcoat. ‘I’ve got you.’

Loneliness snatches his breath. Will rolls his forehead into the sticky leather, tears mingling with sweat on his red cheeks. He can't move; his Alpha put him in this position and he can't do anything about it, but Hannibal is too far away from him now and he's so *helpless*… He needs him, he needs his protection, his seed, his bite, his everything. He wants to rock down, to grind his erection down for some relief, but he can't. He can only hope that Hannibal comes to him soon, touches him soon. So he whimpers and begs him with his eyes and his scent and his open body as he bites his lip. *I'm yours, I'm yours, I'm yours… Please…*

'Look at me, Will,' Hannibal whispers, smiling at him when Will immediately turns his head and gazes at him, black fighting blue as his pupils widen further. *So handsome*… Hannibal removes his shirt and quickly steps out of his trousers, toeing off shoes and socks so that he is as naked as his partner. Will makes a delicious sound of need, half whine, half whimper, and Hannibal grabs him by the hips, yanking him back to the end of the couch. He digs his fingers into the Omega's soft skin; he wants to leave marks, to make Will remember what they did. He can see the bruised bite on Will's shoulder; it flushes as his blood pulses near the surface, and Will cries when Hannibal grabs it, using the movement to haul him back against his hardness.

Yes, yes, yes… Will lifts and arches again, his body clenching and then opening, eager to take his Alpha's knot. The pain of nails cutting into his flesh makes his balls twitch. He can feel himself leaking pre-cum across his stomach, smearing onto the couch. His scent is everywhere, mixed with Hannibal's warm musk. It smells like a hunt, like the wild, like blood and death and *home*. Like *potential*. He growls and rocks back against Hannibal's groin, trying to get his Alpha to fuck him now, hard and fast.

Hannibal holds Will steady and lines himself up. He wants to take Will hard enough that he feels this for days, so he won't stretch him. Pushing past the ring of tight muscle, he snarls at the burning tight embrace of his Omega's body, smacking Will's hand away when he tries to reach back and pull Hannibal in faster. A stretch is one thing; he refuses to damage his mate's body. It's so *hot* and slick, smooth and tight around him, stroking tingling pleasure from the tip of his length to the root. He keeps pushing, slow and steady, until his balls slap against Will's and he can't go any further. His heart thunders in his chest, sweat beads across his forehead and between his pectorals. Will is scorching hot, his muted scent whispering to him. Hannibal's eyes burn red and he growls when he forces himself to pull back, sliding almost all the way out, cold air stinging his damp, sensitive skin where it parts from the other man's body.

Will bites into the pillow to muffle his sob when Hannibal pulls back, his cries turning to groans of pleasure when the Alpha plunges back inside him, filling him again and rubbing back and forth against his prostate. *Fuck… fuck… please…* It's so right. He's so full it almost hurts; he can feel Hannibal against his stomach and when he swallows he's sure he can feel it nudge his *throat*. And then Hannibal starts to move, and it makes his eyes leak, it makes his brain melt and he can't breathe through the heat shrinking his lungs. He scratches dents into the couch, shoving up and back in time to Hannibal's thrusts. There's nothing but their rough pants and the slap of skin, his whimpers and mewls bubbling up into whines and moans and gasps as Hannibal's strength overwhelms him. Pleasure crackles through him, tightening his muscles and making his heart falter every time his Alpha pounds into him. He's dizzy and

light, filled with white fire as Hannibal lifts him even higher and gets further inside him, the angle perfect for hitting that spot again and again and again.

‘You’re mine, Will,’ Hannibal says, reaching around stroking Will whenever he pulls back. It’s difficult to concentrate, but the way Will squeezes him and the beautiful sounds of distress he makes are worth the effort. Hannibal hisses through his teeth, his balls jumping as climax nearly overwhelms him at the way Will’s voice breaks as he gasps,

‘I’m *yours*, I’m *yours*…’

God… Hannibal’s hand on his length, thumb rubbing his aching tip, gathering up wetness and spreading it over his tender skin traps him in place. If he pushes forwards, he’ll come. If he pushes backwards, he’ll come. Will shudders, his stomach coming up and head dropping, bracing himself on shaking arms as he gives himself over to chasing the pleasure.

‘That’s it, Will; let go,’ Hannibal pants, riding him hard as Will bucks beneath him, clenching and arching and thrusting into Hannibal’s hand. They’re losing rhythm, chasing their pleasure until they crash in each other and fall over the edge. Hannibal grabs Will’s hair as he comes, wrenching him up onto his knees and pulling his Omega’s head back so that he can sink his teeth into the muscle of Will’s shoulder again, ripping open the scabs and spilling flesh blood across his skin as he pours his seed into his body.

‘Fuck! Hannibal! Fuck!’ Will comes with a sharp cry, bearing down around Hannibal’s growing knot as he spills himself over the couch, his Alpha’s release scorching his insides, sucked as deep as possible by his pulsing muscles. He can feel Hannibal’s mouth on him, his teeth *inside* him and tongue lapping at his blood. The stinging pain only makes the pleasure that much sweeter, and he can’t stop juddering, only held up by Hannibal’s arms around him. He drops his head back against Hannibal’s chest, trying to catch his breath, his brain refusing to come down from the high.

‘Mmm…’ Hannibal releases Will’s torn shoulder with a last, lingering kiss, pressing a kiss to his Omega’s cheek just to see Will’s face smeared with blood. Such a pity it can’t be someone else’s… yet. He hums into Will’s ear, hugging him tight when Will’s purrs ring out across the quiet room, broken only by sniffs and gasps as the smaller man recovers from the strength of his orgasm. ‘Do you feel better?’ he teases, nibbling at the stubble on Will’s jaw, grinning when the Omega shivers, clenches around his knot and then gasps with new pleasure.

Will moans, still rocking around Hannibal’s knot. It feels so nice… he winds an arm up above his Alpha’s head, holding Hannibal’s face to his nape as he begins to move again, sparking fresh waves of heat every time the knot touches his prostate. *God*... He’s so tender, so raw… He can’t stop chasing it, can’t stop coaxing another orgasm closer, even though it *hurts* with how good it feels. He’s aching again and he grabs one of Hannibal’s hands, silently begging him to stroke him, to cup his balls and jerk him off as he fucks himself on him.

‘Will…’ Hannibal gasps, mouthing at the silky skin on the back of the Omega’s neck, closing his eyes against the urge to bite him. He quivers, his belly on fire as Will moves up and down around his throbbing knot. Pressure builds like a knife behind his balls and he begins to rock his hips again, again and again, closing his eyes against tears when pleasures shatters him and he comes a second time.

‘Hannibal… Hannibal…’ Will screws his eyes tight shut, convulsing around another climax, bright spots exploding over his eyelids as blood roars and he forgets to breathe. He falls forwards, pulling the Alpha with him, and barks a laugh when the taller man crushes him. ‘*Hannibal…*’

Hannibal laughs an apology and shifts to the side, stroking Will’s wet cheeks when the Omega gasps and whimpers at the movement tugging the even bigger knot inside him. He lies with his chest to Will’s back, brushing his mouth over Will’s hair and savouring the smell of him as they lie on the couch, their feet hanging over the end, legs entwined and bodies locked together. He listens to his racing heart, feeling sweat trickle between his shoulder blades, his body humming with satisfaction.

Will breathes slowly, his mind utterly silent as his Alpha holds him. He’s exactly where he belongs, filled with Hannibal’s seed and sealed with his knot, cradled against the taller man’s chest. He is protected and cherished, and the flood of endorphins makes him smile even as tears well in his eyes. He can’t quite remember how he got here, how he got from hugging Hannibal to naked on the couch with him, but as Hannibal’s chest rumbles with another soothing purr, any worry he feels dissolves and he is happy to just accepts it. *Hannibal knows what’s best for me.*

‘I’m yours,’ he whispers, pressing a kiss to his Alpha’s knuckles. ‘I trust you.’

***

Winding tomato skins into roses, Hannibal can’t help but think that Will would make a better kitchen companion than Alana Bloom, but his Omega is working late *again* and Alana made a specific request to see him.

‘I’ve been unspeakably rude,’ he says, sliding the last rose onto the plate with its companions. ‘I haven’t offered you a drink.’

‘I appreciate beer more than wine,’ Alana says, smiling at him from her place as sous chef, chopping carrots for him at the butcher’s block.

‘It’s not *what* you appreciate, it’s *that* you appreciate,’ Hannibal says, wiping his hands on his apron and going to the fridge to fetch her a bottle. ‘A compromise? Beer brewed in a wine barrel. Two years; I bottled it myself.’ *With a unique blend of Omega blood and my own seed to make you more docile*, he thinks, popping the cap.

‘I’m impressed,’ Alana says, watching as Hannibal pours the beer into a glass for her. She dips her nose to appreciate the smell and then takes a sip, smiling at the flavour. ‘A Cabernet Sauvignon wine barrel.’

Hannibal smiles and returns to the kitchen counter.

‘I *love* your palate,’ he purrs. Alana inclines her head.

‘I love your beer.’ She takes another sip of her drink. ‘Mm… I taste oak… what else do I taste?’

Hannibal smirks. *If only you knew…*

‘I will only that “yes” or “no”,’ he replies, and Alana grins, blissfully oblivious. She sets the beer down to continue her prep.

‘Are you serving this at your dinner party?’ she asks.

‘No; this is *your* reserve,’ Hannibal says. Alana raises her eyebrows.

‘My own *private* reserve? Why *thank you*.’

Hannibal’s eyes gleam, but he carefully avoids another smirk and focusses on the delicate task at hand.

‘’I’m curious about something,’ he says, catching the Beta’s attention again. ‘Are you purposefully avoiding the subject of Will Graham?’

Alana covers her blush by gathering up chopping carrots and adding them to the bowl beside her.

‘Absolutely,’ she mutters, because she never *has* been able to lie to the Alpha.

‘Not on my account, I hope,’ Hannibal says lightly. ‘I’m happy to get your perspective.’ *More than happy, in fact… I want you to tell me everything you know about my mate.*

‘No, it’s on Jack Crawford’s account,’ Alana replies. She picks up her beer and approaches Hannibal’s counter. ‘I don’t want any information about Will that I shouldn’t have as his friend.’

Hannibal hums his acceptance of this. He isn’t interested in *sharing* knowledge, only acquiring it. Alana has, after all, known Will since before the Omega was in the FBI – in fact, he’s fairly certain that she is the Beta responsible for securing him his teaching position, as well as providing his pheromone spray, scent deadening shampoo and heat suppressants. Or used to be.

‘Did Jack ask you to profile the Ripper?’ he asks, glancing up when Alana shakes her head.

‘Not since I consulted on the case with Miriam before she disappeared.’

Hannibal is careful to maintain a neutral expression, despite the thrill of knowing that *he* is the one responsible.

‘Crawford’s trainee.’ It isn’t a question, but Alana nods as if it is.

‘Yeah,’ she murmurs. Her special reserve makes her incredibly pliant. Hannibal nods.

‘Very sad.’

They are quiet for a moment, in honor of her memory, and then Alana speaks again.

‘You had me examining PhD candidates that week,’ she says. Hannibal nods.

‘And I’m grateful that you were examining PhD students and not the Ripper,’ he replies. *Otherwise, I would have had to kill you, and I am rather fond of you.* He smirks. ‘You realise those candidates thought we were having an affair?’

Alana blushes but she smiles, her eyes sparkling at the idea. Her scent sweetens with arousal and Hannibal notes how much it has increased since he was her teacher. Her growing attraction to him could be useful.

‘You were *already* having an affair,’ Alana reminds him, and Hannibal quirks an eyebrow, casting his mind back to the handsome young Omega teacher with the dark desires… not unlike Will, but, despite Hannibal’s best efforts, ultimately disappointing. Alana shakes her head at her beer before drinking again. ‘Will does that too, y’know,’ she murmurs, and Hannibal grins.

‘What, have affairs?’ he teases. *Only with me, my dear.*

‘Flirtatiously changes the subject,’ Alana replies. ‘You have that pathology in common.’

We have a great many things in common, Hannibal thinks. Aloud, he decides to test Alana’s feelings for his mate.

‘Or, we just have *you* in common,’ he suggests, and watches as Alana’s cheeks flush pale pink. She chews her lip, her desire sharp with worry. An interesting combination. Poor Will; he really has no chance with her. Hannibal knows that his Omega still harbors feelings for the Beta, and she is one of his most stable sources of support. If Hannibal can turn her against him, Will is far more likely to embrace his darkness. ‘I recall, even before I met Will, you never spoke about him,’ he says.

Alana shrugs and sighs, betraying her tension in the clenching of her jaw.

‘Probably because I just want everybody to leave him alone,’ she says. ‘He’s been through a lot…’ She looks off across the kitchen, and Hannibal considers her. *Do you know the reason for his scar? I think you do, but you would never tell me. You would never betray him like that. Not yet.* He makes sure to look down by the time she turns back to him. ‘It’s not even *about* Will,’ she says unhappily. ‘Jack’s *obsessed* with the Chesapeake Ripper and he’s grooming Will to catch him.’

Hannibal times it so that it looks like he has only just glanced up at her. He holds her gaze for a moment, the silence heavy between them. Alana will assume it is worry, but Hannibal’s mind has returned to the night after the opera, when Will pinned him against the car and growled his claim into the Alpha’s mouth.

A drop of warmth oozes down Hannibal’s spine, settling in his loins, and he gives Alana a small, dark smile.

‘And I *sincerely* hope he does.’

***

After a *painfully* uncomfortable conversation about cheese with Franklyn, Hannibal is looking forward to a more stimulating discussion with his Omega. His stomach tightens in anticipation of getting close enough to breathe in Will's earthy scent, at seeing the way the other man's shoulders loosen the moment Will sees him… He wants to watch the way Will's blue eyes sparkle, revealing his desire for him even when the gold is repressed. He expects to see all of these things, as certain and comforting as the sunrise, but, when he opens the door to his waiting area, it is empty.

Will's not there.

Hannibal frowns. Will's… late? He's never been late before…

Unease coils like a knot in his gut and he checks his watch. Perhaps he has the wrong time…

No, it's is exactly 7.30pm. What's going on?

A foreign emotion begins to creep up his spine. Disappointment? Concern? Hannibal can't quite place it. He closes the door and returns to his desk. Sits slowly, clasping his hands together on the polished wood before reaching for his phone. Should he call him? What if something's happened?

He checks his diary, the knot tightening when he sees his own handwriting, confirming Will's appointment today. He's most likely stuck at work, but it could be something more serious… Will could be in trouble.

Hannibal frowns as he realises what this emotion is.

Worry. He's *worried* about Will. About his mate.

He has to find him.

***

It's dusk. Will is in the fields near his home, sat at the end of a table made from Cassie Boyle's impaled body, his shadow a writhing, living creature inside him, surrounding him, slithering into his lungs and webbing across his brain until he is nothing but darkness.

Abigail smiles at him from her place near Cassie's head. *My beautiful daughter*…

'It's better than it's just the two of us,' she says. Will wants to nod, but he can't move. He's warm and comfortable, sinking down into a hot bath…

'Will?'

His Alpha's voice reaches for him. Will tries to purr, his shadow opening its arms wide to embrace it, but Abigail frowns. She looks scared.

'Dad…'

Will wrenches himself back down, back to Abigail.

‘Yes?’

‘There’s someone else here,’ she says.

‘Will?’ Entering the lecture theatre, Hannibal calls to his Omega again, pitching his voice low so that it soothes him as it draws Will out of the prodromal hallucination. He tilts his head, watching his mate sitting completely still at the head of a table littered with crime scene photos. Will’s blue eyes are vacant, shifting from side to side in a waking dream. His hormones are raging; even with the suppressants he smells of sweet musk and earth, sharp with slick that is no doubt soaking through his boxers. Hannibal smiles; he is extremely attractive like this, helplessly waiting for his Alpha to rescue him. ‘Will?’

The dream fades and he’s back in his lecture theatre, the air cold against his sweaty skin. All he can smell is himself, though he’s sure there’s a rich, cedarwood scent getting stronger. Will blinks rapidly, scrambling from the current and fighting his way back to reality.

‘I have a twenty-four hour cancellation policy,’ Hannibal says, catching his attention as he draws closer. He’s here… in Will’s classroom… why? And why does he look like he was worried only a few minutes ago? Will’s stomach flips and he wets his lips, catching his Alpha’s rich scent on the roof of his mouth. Hannibal is *so* handsome, tall and regal in a navy suit with white tie… *You’re here... I’m okay because you’re here*…

But he’s not okay, otherwise Hannibal wouldn’t *need* to be here. He has a session with him today. Will frowns, still trying to ground himself.

‘What time is it?’

‘Nearly nine o’clock,’ Hannibal replies, and Will’s heart sinks. *Nine o’clock*… He stood Hannibal up… *Fuck*. He buries his face in his hands.

‘Oh God, I’m sorry,’ he groans. Hannibal comes to stand over him.

‘No apology necessary,’ he replies. He watches as Will scrubs his cheeks and looks around, still blurry-eyed and confused. His scent is fading, his body temperature cooling. It will be a few more weeks before he loses hours at a time to the heat, and then it will hit properly. For his sake, Hannibal hopes he’s earned a bond by then.

‘I must’ve fallen asleep,’ Will mutters. ‘Was I sleepwalking?’

‘Your eyes were open, but you were not present,’ Hannibal says, watching his mate’s brow crease with concern.

‘Jesus…’ Will pinches the bridge of his nose, fighting the absurd *Omegan* urge to cry. His heart skips a beat at what his Alpha is telling him; this can’t be happening… sleepwalking is one but this…? More of an absent seizure than anything else. ‘I *felt* as if I was asleep,’ he says, scraping his hands through his hair and rolling his shoulders. ‘I need to stop sleeping altogether. Best way to avoid bad dreams.’

And create stress on your body, which will create more extreme symptoms, Hannibal thinks. He squashes the pang of sympathy – Will needs him to be strong, to show him the way – and casts his eyes over the photographs.

‘Well, I can see why you have bad dreams,’ he says lightly. Will gives a half nod. He stands up; Jack wants him inside the Ripper’s head, and Hannibal is the best person at helping him think like a killer.

‘What do you see, Doctor?’ he asks, inviting Hannibal to review the case whilst moving closer to his Alpha.

Hannibal quirks an eyebrow at Will’s request, refusing to look at him. He knows Will is seeking comfort, but he needs to keep him on his toes just a little longer. To keep himself from reaching for his mate and hugging him, he slides his hands into his pockets.

‘Sum up the Ripper in so many words?’

‘Choose them *wisely*,’ Will says.

‘Oh, I always do,’ Hannibal replies. He begins to sift through the photographs. ‘Words are living things. They have personality, point of view… agenda.’

‘They’re pack hunters,’ Will jokes, though he’s so tired and so *achingly* empty that it comes out flat. Hannibal doesn’t seem to notice, or mind. He never does.

‘Displaying one’s enemies after death has its appeal in many cultures,’ he says. Will leans closer, his dark shadow rearing up to propel him forwards, giving him a surge of energy he doesn’t otherwise feel.

‘These aren’t the Ripper’s *enemies*,’ he says. ‘These are pests that he *swatted*.’

‘The reward for their cruelty,’ Hannibal replies, admiring one of his older works. Will scoffs.

‘Oh, he doesn’t have a problem with *cruelty*,’ he says. ‘The reward is for *undignified* behaviour. These dissections are to disgrace them. It’s a public shaming.’

Hannibal has to fight to keep from purring at how clever his mate is. Instead, he feeds his pride to his own darkness; a taste of what’s to come.

‘Takes their organs away because, in his mind, they don’t deserve them,’ he explains. He finally allows himself to look at Will, to show him the hint of red around his dark eyes, and Will stares back. He can feel their connection, even if he isn’t quite sure what it is; it’s more than just a sexual attraction, but a blending of shadows and dark, wicked minds.

‘In some way,’ the Omega says quietly.

Hannibal picks up the photograph of Miriam’s severed arm. He’s been terribly curious to know how Jack reacted to finding a piece of his precious, *abandoned* Omega. Now seems the perfect opportunity to find out.

‘What’s this?’ he asks, feigning ignorance. Will’s scent sours with distress and he turns away to pace off some of his tension.

‘It’s Jack Crawford’s trainee,’ he says. ‘She’s not like the other victims. The Ripper had no reason to humiliate Miriam Lass.’

Hannibal regards the image.

‘Seems to me he was humiliating *someone*.’

‘Yeah; he was humiliating Jack,’ Will replies. Hannibal feels a thrill, though his tone is one of careful, distant curiosity. A clinical interest.

‘Did it work?’

Will locks eyes with him, darkness swimming beneath the blue.

‘I’d say it worked *really* well.’

Hannibal looks at him, fighting down a smirk. He replaces the photograph before his scent can change and turns to face his mate.

‘Have you eaten?’ he asks softly. Will shakes his head. Before Hannibal can suggest dinner, though, the Omega’s eyes are drawn to the images again, and he steps closer to the table as though pulled by a magnet. Hannibal moves around the desk to stand beside him, offering his warmth and scent until Will’s dark shadow is sated. He allows his arm to brush Will’s and the Omega unconsciously shifts closer, dipping his head so that the Alpha can see the side of his throat.

‘I want you to stay with me tonight,’ Hannibal murmurs. ‘You need to rest.’ He smiles when Will nods, and twines their fingers together. ‘I’m hosting a dinner party tomorrow; would you care to join me?’

Will glances up at him, doubt etched into his frown and the unhappy turn of his mouth.

‘Who are your other guests?’ he asks. ‘Alphas?’

Hannibal offers him a delicate shrug and an apologetic smile.

‘Like words, we too are pack hunters,’ he says. Will’s breath catches and he leans in, looking from Hannibal’s lips to his eyes.

‘You’re not,’ he murmurs. ‘You’re a solitary predator.’

‘For now,’ Hannibal replies, dipping his head to brush his lips very gently across Will’s. The Omega moans but then blushes, ducking his head and wiping his mouth as though afraid Hannibal’s touch will have left a mark.

‘Sorry; I can’t…. not here,’ he mutters. Hannibal gives his elbow a reassuring squeeze.

‘I understand.’ And he does; he can smell two Alpha scents approaching, long before their footsteps sound on the carpet of the hallway. Beverly Katz and Jack Crawford appear in the doorway and Hannibal smiles as though truly pleased to see them. Will looks up a moment later, as Jack booms his greeting towards him.

‘Will, there you are.’

Almost as though he expects Will to be a faithful dog, trained to stay at his heel, Hannibal thinks. *Watch yourself, Agent Crawford; you are bordering on rude.*

‘And Dr Lecter,’ Jack continues, striding up to the desk with Beverly keeping pace just behind him. ‘What a surprise. We have a lead.’ He looks into Hannibal’s open, expectant face. ‘Would you care to, er, help us catch the Ripper?’ he offers.

Hannibal would laugh, but that would spoil the game, and, this way, he can keep an eye on Will at the crime scene, and escort him home to pack an overnight bag afterwards.

‘How could I refuse?’

***

Beverly tracks the missing ambulance to an alleyway, where they find Devon Silvestri feverishly trying not to kill his latest organ “donor”. Jack points his rifle squarely at Devon’s face, and bellows for Dr Lecter to take over so that he can make the arrest. Hannibal raises an eyebrow at Will – it’s quite exciting, really – and hurries forwards to analyse the situation. Will keeps a step behind him, slowing when the back of the ambulance comes into sight. *It’s not the Ripper… It’s not, Jack, I’m sorry.*

Hannibal climbs into the back of the van and peers down at Mr Silvestri’s appalling attempt at surgery. He doesn’t bother to keep the disdain from his voice when he says to Jack,

‘He was removing his kidney. Poorly.’

Beside him, Devon blushes, and his scent colors with shame.

‘I can stop the bleeding,’ Hannibal adds. Jack nods.

‘Do it.’

Hannibal removes his suit jacket and tosses it to the side. Rolls up his sleeves and pulls on a latex glove. He can feel Will’s eyes on him, but he needs to concentrate. He slides his fingers past Silvestri’s, reaching for the cut seeping blood, and presses down.

‘Have you got it?’ Jack asks, impatient to get the cuffs on his “Ripper”. Hannibal waits until he is certain, and then nods.

‘I’ve got it.’

Jack instructs Silvestri to exit the vehicle and moves to collect him from the side door. The officers move with him, giving Will a clear view of Hannibal. His Alpha is calm, even as he

concentrates on saving a man's life. Heat rolls through Will's body again and his breath catches as slick trickles down his thighs.

Hannibal catches the faint musk of Will's arousal and glances up at him. *That's my boy… I'm doing this for you, Will, so that you and I have saved a life together.*

Will can't tear his eyes away, absorbed by the way the tendons ripple in Hannibal's arms, in the way his greying hair falls over his forehead when he leans forwards, the steely look as he calculates the precise pressure with which to suture the split artery. The Alpha always has such control, such power… His dark shadow licks at his ear, caressing the fine hairs around the burning nape of his neck as flecks of blood colour Hannibal's arms crimson.

You look good in red.

He can't wait for a time when it's for a different reason.

***

Watching Hannibal cook is hypnotic, like watching poetry in motion. Will stands in the kitchen doorway, awkwardly cradling the bottle of wine he's brought in lieu of staying, watching his mate carve roasted meat and create art out of food. But they're not alone; there are Beta sous-chefs around them, and Will isn't ready to make a scene in front of them.

'I have a butcher who carries sow's blood,' Hannibal says, unlocking the blender from its base after blitzing the contents. 'Centrifugate, separate the matter from the water, creates a transparent liquid.' He pours it into a bowl and swipes his finger across the rim to catch the spill. Will's insides quiver; he is reminded of the Alpha's fondness for gathering up his slick and licking it. 'Serve with tomatoes in suspension,' Hannibal continues, glancing up at him and grinning as though he can read Will's mind. 'And everyone will love the sweet taste.'

Just as I love the sweet taste of you, Will.

'Are you sure you can't stay?' he checks.

'Er… I don't think I would be good company,' Will mutters, glancing to the side as a Beta moves past him carrying a plate of food. His head is pounding and he feels sick. As delicious as the food looks, he can't eat anything tonight.

'I disagree,' Hannibal replies, and Will manages a small, grateful smile. He hates to disappoint his Alpha, but he doesn't want to show him up in front of his friends, especially other Alphas and their well-behaved, perfectly socialised Omegas. Hannibal deserves better.

The Alpha narrows his eyes, sensing more than just a bad headache as Will's reluctance to join him.

'But, before you go; what became of Mr Silvestri's donor?'

'You saved his life,' Will says. Hannibal glances up, then returns to his cooking.

'Been a long time since I used a scalpel on anything but a pencil,' he muses.

‘Why’d you stop being a surgeon?’ Will asks, shifting his weight because he *really* wants to go to Hannibal and soak up his warmth, perhaps even help him, but the foreign scents are making his back hurt with tension. Hannibal was so *good* at the crime scene yesterday; it’s hard to imagine anything wanting to make him quit.

‘I killed someone,’ Hannibal says simply. ‘Or, more accurately, I couldn’t save someone. But it felt like killing them.’

Will nods, but that doesn’t explain it.

‘You were an emergency room surgeon; it has to happen from time to time.’

‘It happened one time too many,’ Hannibal says, lifting the bowl to pour the contents into the sieve. ‘I transferred my passion for anatomy into the culinary arts –’ *More than anyone realises*. ‘ – I fix minds instead of bodies, and no one’s died as a result of my therapy.’

Will huffs a laugh. *Yet*. He drops his gaze; he needs to lie down in a dark room with an ice pack over his forehead. Of course, he can’t *do* that; Jack wants to go through the Ripper files with him again. He might as well do it tonight, since he won’t be spending time with his own Alpha.

‘I have to go,’ he says softly. ‘I have a date with the Chesapeake Ripper.’

No, you don’t, Hannibal thinks, but he doesn’t look up from pushing the mixture through the sieve.

‘Or, is that *rippers*?’ he asks. Will shakes his head; the idea didn’t stick.

‘Devon Silvestri was harvesting organs, but not with the Ripper,’ he says. ‘There’s no connection between them.’

‘Jack must be devastated,’ Hannibal says, his darkness purring with savage glee. Will looks away, fighting the urge to roll his eyes.

‘I imagine he is.’ He glances back and stills when Hannibal holds his gaze. His heart skips a beat and he swallows a whine. He doesn’t want to go. He wants to stay with Hannibal, tonight and every night to come… And Hannibal wants him to stay, too. He can see it; the pain this is causing him. He tries for a smile but it’s more of a grimace, placing the bottle on the counter. ‘Enjoy the wine.’

Hannibal smiles at him, accepting the unspoken apology, granting forgiveness because it’s what Will needs from him tonight.

‘Thank you.’

Will ducks his head as he turns away, shivering at the sharp twinge in the nape of his neck. His head throbs and his eyes sting with every step away from his Alpha.

I’ll come home soon, he thinks, letting himself out of Hannibal’s house and into the dark, empty night. *And I know you’ll be waiting for me.*

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for sticking with this, peeps, and welcome to anyone new! I hope you continue to enjoy, and SORRY it took so long to write. Gosh darn LIFE getting in the way!!! Anyway, you'll have noticed some slight deviations (Will at the opera) but I couldn't resist - it will continue as faithfully as possible aside from little bits like this. Can you imagine those two together in tuxedos??? *heart melts*

Fromage

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal's relationship faces a number of threats as the Omega's mental health begins to decline and a rival Alpha challenges Dr Lecter for the right to bond with Will.

Chapter Notes

Hey peeps... SORRY this took so long to write! I've been away on holiday and LIFE GOT IN THE WAY.
Anywho, it's done now, so I really hope you enjoy reading as much as I enjoyed writing.
FYI - I made an amendment to Chapter 6 - towards the end of the chapter, Will and Hannibal have a bit more of a conversation about bonding, crests and Alpha/Omega courting before Will jumps him (again) so feel free to read that if you're interested. However, it doesn't affect the plot so don't worry if you don't wanna go back for it.
Right, on to Chapter 9...

Whenever he's feeling stressed, Will fixes boat motors. It's an old habit, learned from his father. There's something very soothing about knowing which pieces fit where, and taking the time to put them all back together so that the machine works the way it should. Far simpler than people, there is one clear way forwards and no room for interpretation.

Stretched out on the rug near his bed, Will listens to the steady thud of his heart and the click of the screwdriver. The dogs lie around him, some in their baskets, Buster and Rudy on his bed, all of them keeping him company. They are a pack, together, only it's not as comforting as it usually is, and he is still tense, even though he's been working on this engine since dawn.

The house is quiet. The next few days yawn ahead of him; an empty seventy-two hours of rest until work resumes. Solitude doesn't normally bother him, in fact, he *seeks* it, but today it makes him ache.

He knows why. Knows why his hands shake when he's not focused on the motor, why he's been having nightmares about half-eaten girls, tossing and turning on damp, scratching sheets as he dreams of an ebony stag just out of reach, waking up drenched in sweat and slick as his insides cramp around nothing.

Three days. It's been three days since he last saw Hannibal. Three days since he touched his Alpha, breathed in his scent... It's not that long, really, but this time the separation is torture.

A shrill sound of distress cuts through the silence, chilling him to the bone. Will pauses, frowning over his shoulder to see if it's one of the dogs. No; they're fine. He waits for a moment, wondering if he imagined it, and then gives up and resumes digging out a chewed up screw.

The sound comes again. It's definitely some sort of animal, and it's in pain. Could be stuck in a hunter's trap, or been hit by a car and left to die on the side of the road… Alone and frightened…

He can't leave it. Abandoning the boat motor, Will gets up and grabs his coat, pulling it on as he heads outside. It's cold but sunny; snow lingers in the shaded parts of the fields and his front yard, crunching under his boots. The crisp air feels good against his sticky skin and he leaves his coat undone to cool down as he tramps across the marshy ground towards the screams.

They echo across the landscape, making it hard to pinpoint their location. Will slows, frowning as he sweeps his gaze over the fields, towards the woods. It's a big area, and he doesn't want to go running off in the wrong direction.

He looks down at the ground, trying to find any tracks. Nothing…

Sighing with frustration, he turns a full circle as he waits for the calls to resume. He starts to walk towards the tree line, slowly so that he won't get too far in case he needs to turn around. He strains to pick up any further sounds of distress, angry at the blood roaring in his ears because it's making it difficult to hear anything, but whatever was in distress seems to have quieted.

His chest tightens and a lump forms in his throat. It's probably dead…

He stops again, looking back towards his house, blinking in surprise at how far he's gone. He hadn't realized he was moving so quickly.

His breath billows in front of him when he sighs again, and Will scrubs a hand through his hair. He's not gonna find it like this… Not by himself.

I could call Hannibal, he thinks, his belly tingling at the idea of seeing his Alpha again. *Ask him to help me search…*

No. He can't. Hannibal is busy, otherwise he would have called. He would have invited him over, even after Will refused to stay for his dinner party.

Unless he's angry… or needs space… Will can't stop the nasty little thoughts from creeping through his brain, stinging the nape of his neck. He shoves his hands into his coat pockets to stop himself from rubbing at the imaginary pain, his skin prickling and sweat beading on his forehead.

No. Hannibal said he wants Will as a mate, and he understands Will's obligation to finding the Ripper. He was fine with Will not staying for the dinner party. The Alpha had a full life

before Will came along; of course he's just busy. Will would never expect him to drop everything just to come and spend time with him because he's feeling needy. *Clingy*.

He stomps back inside before he can dwell on it anymore, throwing his coat over a chair and resolutely picking up the screwdriver.

He's fine. He's going to be fine. A few more days alone and then he'll see Hannibal again. He's been perfectly fine by himself for years; he can survive on his own for a few *days*.

The next morning, he calls Alana and asks her if she wants to come over.

'If it wasn't a coyote, the coyotes probably got it,' he says, squinting against the sun as he looks out towards the trees. The Beta picks her way towards him, not as comfortable on the uneven ground as he is. She's wrapped up in a burgundy coat and leather gloves, but her scarf is thin and her cheeks and nose are pink from the cold. The wind is bitter today; Will's dug out an old sweater and layered up with his fishing jacket, a woolen hat pulled down to protect his ears. It's good to wear layers; he doesn't want any part of him exposed today.

He grimaces at his own morbid thought and mutters,

'Probably got it even if it *was* a coyote.'

'You're not expecting to find it alive, are you?' Alana asks, taking the lead as Will falls into step at her heel.

'We'll be lucky to find a paw,' he replies, and the Beta gives him a long-suffering smile.

'So, you invited me over to help you collect animal parts?' she teases. Will chuckles.

'Er, I invited you over on the off chance we do find it alive,' he says. 'It's harder for me to wrangle a wounded animal by myself.' The Beta is distracting; her scent is strong with the effort of walking through the snow, and she is upwind of Will, so he is sucking it in every time he takes a breath. Alana smells warm and comforting, a hint of flowers and caramel, like family. Not as strong or as heady as Hannibal's, but he's so lonely and she's always been there for him. His insides clench and he deliberately looks out across the flat fields. 'Did you think it was a date?'

She considers him for a moment and then looks away.

'Honestly, it never crossed my mind.'

Disappointment is like a kick in the gut, and Will works hard to keep it from his voice.

'Oh.' He forces a laugh and then frowns. '… Why not?'

Alana raises her eyebrows at him, at how open he's being with her, and then shrugs.

'You just don't seem like you date,' she says carefully.

‘Oh? Too broken to date?’ Will grins as he presses a hand to his heart. Thinks of Hannibal, of his night at the opera with him. That was a date… Wasn’t it?

Alana smiles at him, her blue eyes twinkling.

‘You’re not broken,’ she says kindly. Will grins back, enjoying the banter, and then looks around for any signs of the animal they’re supposed to be tracking. Slips his hands into his trouser pockets to keep from reaching out to touch her. He's not even sure why he wants to, he just misses human contact. Hannibal's a very tactile partner; he's become accustomed to casual touches and strokes every so often. *Dependent...* He distracts himself with another question.

‘What’s *your* excuse?’

Alana snorts.

‘For not dating?’ She pauses when Will slows, and he nods at her before inspecting the ground again. Gives up and they keep going. ‘Why are you assuming I don’t date?’ she says. It’s Will’s turn to raise his eyebrows.

‘*Do* you?’

Alana grins at her feet.

‘… No.’ She sighs. ‘Seems like something for somebody else. I’m sure I’ll become that somebody someday, but… right now I think too much.’

Will frowns; he can sense her sadness, a hint of regret tainting her scent. *Who do you regret not dating, Alana?* To distract them both, he says,

‘So what are you gonna do; you gonna try to *think* less? Or just wait till it happens naturally?’

Alana shrugs.

‘I haven’t thought about it.’

They slow until Will comes to a stop, hands on his hips as he looks around at the undisturbed earth and gently swaying grass. There should be *something*, some sign of an animal…

‘Are you seeing anything?’ Alana asks, giving voice to Will’s concerns.

He frowns.

‘Er, *no*, actually… I’m not even seeing any tracks. I mean, except for the ones we made.’

Alana keeps her face neutral, accepting it, but Will can smell worry in her scent. Maybe she’s just sad for him… Of course, she could be concerned that they won’t find the animal, because if it *is* still alive, it won’t be for much longer…

He sighs.

‘We should head back,’ he says, admitting defeat. Alana nods, still looking oddly at him. Will forces a half-smile and waits for her to get a step ahead of him as they turn around. 'Thanks for helping me look, though.'

'Of course.'

They walk the rest of the way back in silence, stopping only for Will to double, triple check for the elusive tracks. All too soon, his little house comes into view. They head inside, greeted by barks and licks from excited dogs, and shed coats, gloves, hats and scarves.

'Do you want a coffee?' Will asks, calling back to her over his shoulder as he heads into the kitchen.

'Sure.' Alana waits behind and Will's gut twists as he busies himself filling the pot with water. She doesn't want to be alone in a room with him... Afraid he'll jump her?

I wish Hannibal was here.

The thought snatches his breath with the suddenness of it, and Will waits for the tremble in his hand to calm down before reaching for a pair of mugs. After he's made drinks, adding an extra heap of sugar to his own, he carries them through to find Alana sat at the dining table. Places a steaming drink in front of her and takes his usual seat next to her.

'Is everything okay?' Alana asks, piercing him with her gaze. Will swallows, fiddling with a chip in the rim of the cup.

'Yeah...' His mouth turns down, betraying the lie, and he shrugs. 'Just got a few things on my mind.'

'The Ripper?' Alana asks quietly, and Will looks up from under sad brows. Tilts his head because that's only just of many. Alana taps her nails on her mug. 'I don't like the way Jack's using you,' she admits. 'But I'm glad that Hannibal is there for you.'

Will's heart turns over in his chest. Does she know? Has she guessed, or did Hannibal tell her? They're close, after all...

'He is,' he says slowly. 'Has he... said anything?'

'About you?' Alana raises her eyebrows and shakes her head. 'No; and I wouldn't let him. I told him, I don't want any information about you that I shouldn't have as your friend.'

Will huffs a laugh and manages a wonky smile.

'Patient-psychiatrist confidentiality privilege, even if I'm not officially his patient,' he jokes.

Alana hums agreement and the silence settles between them as they each sip their drinks. After a few minutes, Will sighs and sits back in his chair, rolling his neck and shoulders in a vain attempt to loosen the knots. Rubs the base of his hairline and realizes there might be something that the Beta can help him with. Advice.

'Hannibal asked me about my scar,' he says quietly. Alana looks surprised; she knows how private Will is about that, about any part of his Omega biology and his past.

'What did you tell him?' she asks.

'I... haven't told him anything, yet,' Will replies. He drums his fingers on the table. 'But I think I want to.'

'Really?'

Will can understand her skepticism; she's assuming Hannibal still thinks of him as a Beta. He gives a little chuckle and ducks his head.

'He, er, he knows what I am,' he admits. 'He's known for a while.'

'Oh...' Alana blows out a breath and looks away. Will can almost *hear* the thoughts swirling in her mind. Admitting the truth to an Alpha is reckless, but it's not her place to scold him. She could get into some trouble for having helped him lie his way into Quantico, but she trusts Hannibal, completely… Such conflict.

She looks back at him, eyes gentle with concern and sympathy.

'Do you *want* to tell him about it?' she asks softly.

About the attack, about being outed as an Omega working in Homicide and unable to keep your job because none of your Alpha colleagues would keep their hands off you? About the nervous breakdown brought on by the pain of cutting your neck in a panicked attempt to prevent further advances?

Will stares down into his half-empty mug, at the faint ring of coppery brown just visible around his blue irises. His gut twists at the idea of being so open and vulnerable to Hannibal, but if he's going to bond with the man, then this would a good first step. *I trust him… I think…*

He sighs.

'Yeah... I do.'

Alana is quiet for a moment, and Will looks at her. She's chewing her lip, clearly trying to decide what to say, or how best to say it.

'I think it would be good for you to talk about it,' she finally says, and Will breathes a sigh of relief. He stills when the Beta reaches forwards and covers both of his hands with her own. 'I really think Hannibal can be good for you, Will, if you let him in. I'm glad you feel you can be honest with him about this.'

Will smiles and nods, looking down at Alana's creamy skin. She's warm, and it feels good, even if it's only his hands being held. It's nothing like what Hannibal does to him; the Alpha's touch sets him on fire, burning away all thought and reason until he'd do anything for just a

little bit more, but he can still feel heat pooling in the pit of his stomach, spreading down until he starts to ache...

Alana clears her throat, and pulls back, her cheeks tinged pink at the Omega's unconscious whine of desire. Will's scent is dulled by heat suppressants, but she can still feel herself reacting to his sweet musk, listing forwards as though she could kiss him, and this is a very, *very* bad idea...

'I should go,' she mumbles, standing up before Will can argue. She hurries into the front room and pulls on her coat, looking flustered as she winds her scarf around her neck. 'Take care of yourself, Will,' she says, pausing at the screen door to look back at him where he's hovering by the fireplace. She moves as though she wants to hug him but then stops herself, and Will saves her the embarrassment by shoving his hands in his pockets, making it clear that he's fine without a hug, without contact, and that she's free to go because he'll be fine. He's fine… He's *fine*.

He watches from the porch as Alana climbs into her car and drives away, the hybrid engine silent and tires barely crunching on the road. *Almost as if she was never here...* He waits until she has disappeared past the line of trees and then he lets some of the pain show on his face, pressing a hand to his cramping gut because he's *not* fine. He's so *empty*…

Fumbling for his suppressants, Will knocks a couple of tablets back and pinches the bridge of his nose. Goes back inside but he can't settle to anything. He almost wishes the animal noises would start again, so that he'd have an excuse to go outside and *do* something, but it's quiet and he's alone with just the dogs, who watch him pace back and forth from a half-finished lure to the bookshelf to the boat motor back to the lure.

As the sun starts to set, he ends up lying flat on his back in bed, watching the shadows lengthen across the ceiling. He'd woken up with a headache, but it had gone down when Alana was with him. Now it slams home, tightening around his skull until he feels sick. Maybe he's coming down with something...

Groaning to himself, Will brushes his hand over his cell phone. He's itching to call Hannibal, to hear his soothing voice. Waves of heat roll through him and he whines, grinding his ass down as slick leaks out of him. It's an unusual sensation; half-blinded with pain but *achingly* hard and desperate to come at the same time. Sweat oozes from his pores, soaking through his clothes until they cling to him like a second skin.

Will rolls onto his side, rubbing his pounding head into the mattress, biting on a pillow to keep from chewing his own tongue. He feels numb, but also boiling and freezing at the same time. The nape of his neck is smarting, so tender and desperate to be touched. To be broken, bitten, scarred…

The dogs whine. They're worried about him. Will wants to comfort them, to tell them he's okay but he doesn't know if he is... He doesn't know how to speak, how to *breathe*… He's drowning in the dark current rising within him and all he can do is tear at his clothes until he's naked. He scrapes his hands through wet curls, pushing them back from his flushed face, his chest heaving as he fights for air. He's burning up, his vision shrinking as blackness swarms the edges of his vision.

Reaching down, he takes himself in his hand and begins to rub, whimpering at how *good* it feels, and how much it *hurts* because it's not his Alpha touching him. His cheeks are damp with more than just sweat, and he can't stop the desperate, mewling sounds that claw up from his throat.

Alpha… Alpha… Hannibal… He needs him, needs him, needs him… Will hisses as a wave of pleasure shakes him apart, wincing as he spills his release over his belly and hand. His stomach convulses and spit gathers in his mouth. Oh God…

He throws himself to the side just in time and vomits onto the floor, dry heaving again and again until he can taste blood and his ears are ringing. Flops back onto the wet sheets, coughing and groaning because he's pulled something with the force of retching. He doesn't feel right… He's not well…

Hannibal ... He needs Hannibal...

Exhaustion drags his eyes closed, even though he knows he needs to clean up the mess he just made. But he can't… he can't move. He's so heavy, falling into crushing darkness…

See…?

The whisper is in him, licking his insides with fire. Will scrabbles for the phone, desperate to call his Alpha, but he drops it onto the floor and it skids away out of reach.

'No... Hannibal...' Will manages to roll onto his front, his eyelids fluttering as he fights shimmering grey spots. He reaches out, blindly groping at air, and then his eyes roll back in his head and he passes out.

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When he wakes later, the headache has faded to a dull ache behind his eyes and Will can't remember how he ended up naked in bed. He's shivering; he must have fallen asleep with the quilt pushed down to the end of the mattress, curled around a pillow the same way he curls up to Hannibal with his head on the Alpha's chest.

What time is it? What *day* is it? Will reaches for a blanket and pulls it around himself. Rubs his eyes and wipes his sticky face, frowning when he smells himself on his fingers. When did he jerk off? *Why* did he jerk off? He's not done that since he started having sex with Hannibal…

Swinging his legs round, he sits up and tries to get his bearings. He's at his house, in Wolf Trap, Virginia. Looks at his clock, at the pale blue numbers, and frowns. It's ten o'clock at night. No wonder the house is dark and freezing cold.

The dogs must be starving. Will gets up, wrapping the blanket more securely around him to hide his nakedness, and pads across the room to let them out. He's still tired, and he feels weak, as if he's recovering from the flu. The last thing he remembers was… Alana was here. She was helping him search for the animal he'd heard yesterday… But she'd gone home…

He'd needed to lie down because of a migraine… Well, that explains how he ended up in bed. He must have undressed to be more comfortable.

Will pulls on boxers and a fresh t-shirt from the dresser beside him, and prepares dinner for the dogs before letting them back in. He gulps down a glass of water, then another, but the idea of eating turns his stomach right now. He huffs and smiles to himself as he drains the last of the cool liquid. Hannibal is going to tell him off again for not taking proper care of himself.

Wandering through the house, he switches on all of his lamps and turns the dial of the electric heater to ward off the chill. Snow drifts down outside the windows, settling on the frame, and Will watches it for a while. He frowns when he notices his reflection in the dark glass, obscuring his view of the flakes. He's very pale, his cheeks are drawn and there are dark bruises under his eyes. He needs to put some more drops in; the irises are ringed with bright gold. Collecting them from his side table, he gives himself a double dose and then knocks back another heat suppressant because he's not sure if he took any earlier.

He rolls his shoulders, grimacing at how his t-shirt and boxers chafe against his sweaty skin. He needs a shower...

The hot water feels good on his aching muscles. Will turns his face into the spray, enjoying the way it batters his eyelids. Reaches for his bottle of scent-deadening shampoo but hesitates before he can open it. He's not going anywhere for a couple of days... There's no reason he can't use the cedarwood one, which reminds of his Alpha and might help him to sleep tonight.

He dips his nose to suck up the smell of it as he squeezes out a handful of soap, and moans softly to himself as he massages it into his scalp. It *does* smell like Hannibal, and it's making him tingle and twitch in all the right places. He lathers more of it into his arms, across his chest and up the insides of his thighs. He wants *all* of him to smell of Hannibal. He coats his fingers and rubs them between his ass cheeks, bowing his head so that the water pounds onto the nape of his neck. The skin there is so sensitive that he can feel *every* drop of water, and Will hums his satisfaction as they rain down in an endless drumming pattern of lightning fast taps, again and again over the throbbing flesh. His fingers are slippery with slick and soap, and he works a couple of tips inside, just enough to tease. He's not going to come; he's not even going to try; he's just putting a smell there for Hannibal to enjoy the next time his Alpha sees him. The thought makes him smile and he rolls his hips down around his hand, muscles clenching to pull up as much of the shampoo as possible.

You're inside me, Hannibal, more than you know.

Curling up around a pillow in bed that night, Will allows himself a moment of weakness and places his cedarwood-smelling hand firmly over his eyes, blocking out his sight. It's *nothing* like when Hannibal blindfolded him, but it's enough of a reminder that his shoulders relax. He rubs at his stubble, frowning at the rasp too loud in the silence of the house.

I miss you…

Staring at the blue numbers of his clock, he forces himself to lie perfectly still, listening to nothing but the thump of his heartbeat and the whisper of air flowing in and out of his nose,

and waits to see if he'll be able to sleep.

***

When Jack calls the next morning to tell him that there's a murder and that he needs him back at work earlier than expected, Will feels an odd mixture of relief mingled with dread. He didn't sleep much - too many nightmares and a throbbing headache that made even his *belly* hurt - but although he struggles to speak around the lump in his throat, he's dressed and waiting an hour before the Alpha arrives, too nervous for anything more than a cup of bitter coffee.

He flinches when Jack gets out of the car and comes up to the porch to get him, his shadow growling at the overbearing scent of the other Alpha invading his space. *Hannibal's* space. He doesn't invite Jack in, just locks the door behind him and nods that he's ready to go.

Jack's face looks etched from stone, all hard lines and down-turned mouth, and he frowns when Will leans against the passenger door, putting as much distance between himself and the Alpha as he can in the confinement of the car.

'How are you?' he asks, glaring at his tense form. Will pulls his glasses from his jacket and slips them on; another layer of protection between himself and the outside world.

'Fine.'

'You seem different,' Jack persists. Will clenches his jaw to keep from baring his teeth at him. Settles for pinching the bridge of his nose, instead.

'Didn't sleep well,' he mutters, and Jack nods slowly, but he's not done, yet.

'You've changed your shampoo,' he says, prompting Will to glance over and quirk an eyebrow in question. The Alpha shrugs. 'You smell different.'

'Didn't think I'd be going out for a few days,' Will says, a dark purr inside his mind at the idea of making Jack feel guilty, even just for a moment, and hurting him with it. 'Don't worry; I've got my Beta spray with me.'

'You don't smell Omegan,' Jack replies. 'You just smell like Dr Lecter.'

'Do I?' Will feigns quiet surprise, muted enough that the Alpha won't be suspicious. 'I just like the smell.'

'Your eyes aren't as gold as they used to be,' Jack continues. 'And your scent is duller.'

'New meds,' Will mutters, ducking his head because he is *not* having this conversation with this Alpha. 'Why the sudden interest, Jack?'

'You don't think I was interested before?' Jack replies. 'I'm responsible for you, Will.'

Will rolls his eyes.

‘I’m *fine*.’

The Alpha sighs, his leather gloves creaking as he grips the steering wheel.

‘Fine?'

‘*Fine*.’

‘Alright, then.’ Jack turns back to the road and that's that. Pleasantries over. He's fulfilled his duties as the Alpha responsible for the Omega in his care. Will fights back a snort and stares out of the window.

They arrive at the theatre, and Will is grateful that the show Hannibal took him to see was hosted somewhere else; he doesn't want to taint his memories of that night. He stays close to Jack's side, ascending the steps to the center stage as the forensics team move away. Giving him space to do what he does best. Think like a killer.

'The victim is Douglas Wilson,' Jack says. 'A member of the Baltimore Metropolitan Orchestra; brass section. Trombone player.'

Will leaves the Alpha's side to circle the body, his shadow purring at the precision with which the cello neck has been inserted into Mr Wilson's throat, perfectly balanced against the chords.

'He was killed shortly after his last performance,' Jack continues. 'Blunt force trauma to the back of the head.'

'His killer brought him here to... put on a *show*,' Will says, glancing up at the stage lights and the backdrop. He steps backwards, his head lowering as the dark current rises, pulling him into the memories. They are comforting... somewhat familiar... An *Alpha* did this... Will's throat tightens around a whine of longing as he chases the memories etched into the air, sucking them down with a slow, deep breath that smells like blood. Like *life*.

Jack narrows his eyes at the Omega.

'So, is it me, or is it getting easier for you to look?' he asks.

Will sighs. The moment shatters, the violence slicing at him as his shadow slips away, leaving him open to the pain, and his voice shakes as he replies,

'I tell myself it's purely an intellectual exercise,' he says. He ignores the concerned look from Beverly Katz and shakes a couple of heat suppressants out; he's getting another headache.

'Well, in the narrow view of forensics, that's exactly what it is,' Jack says. Will clenches his teeth to keep from growling at him.

'It's not any *easier*, Jack,' he snaps. He knocks the tablets back and dry swallows them, his stomach writhing. 'Shake it off, keep on looking...'

Jack stares at the dead man, at the exposed vocal chords and broken jaw.

'Good.' The Alpha prowls closer to Will, getting right up into his space as the Omega lowers his head in submission. Jack's breath pushes his scent over Will's face, reminding him who owns him, who's in charge here. *Him*, not Will. 'You shake it off. Get to work,' he says. Jerks his head to Beverly, telling her to leave. 'We'll come back in when you're ready for us.'

Will waits, alone on the stage, whipped raw and freezing. The current of violence rises around him and his shadow stirs with it, coiling up his legs and spreading across his ribs as he wades into the dark stream. Warmth trickles through him, the darkness licking his wounds, healing him, protecting him. He's not Will anymore... Not anyone... And then, he's...

An Alpha... A predator... Powerful... I can provide for my mate... I will kill for you...

Time slows. He *knows* how the throat was cut because *he* did it. He forced the neck of the cello down. *He* drew the bow across the chords.

My sound...

He can hear clapping, slow at first, then faster and faster. He looks up into the audience and fear licks up his spine.

Garrett Jacob Hobbs...

My first mate... my Alpha... I got inside your head, and you got inside mine...

Will swallows, his hands shaking on the bow. He can't make himself drop it, though. He wants to play, wants to show what he's capable of. How far he's come. His *potential*.

I'm doing this for you... I want to impress you, so that you'll bond me...

Hobbs lowers his chin, smiling as their shadows reach for each other, blending and twisting and kissing in the cold, still air between them. Heat rolls through Will's body and he shifts as slick wets the back of his boxers.

Soon...

***

'Played him like a fiddle.'

Price's voice drags Will back to the present. He's sat on a spare table, pushed against the cabinet so that he's out of the way as Beverly and her team work. They all lean over Mr Wilson, inspecting the deconstructed instrument that he is.

'Along with rosin powder, we found sodium carbonate, sulfur dioxide, lye and olive oil in the wounds.' Beverly looks round at Will as she speaks; details help him to reconstruct, so she's giving him details.

'What is the deal with the olive oil?' Zeller asks.

'Sure wasn't making salad,' Price replies, grimacing at the body again.

'He removed anything non-muscular or fatty from around the vocal folds,' Zeller continues. 'The chords themselves were treated with a sulfur dioxide solution.'

'The sulfur dioxide had the effect of *hardening* the vocal chords,' Price explains, following Beverly's lead and directing the facts to Will, to help him do what it is that he does.

Will nods, his mouth wet with spit as bile scratches his throat.

'Made them easier to play,' he whispers. The current washes through him and he sneers at the trombonist. 'Had to open you up to get a decent sound out of you.'

Zeller gapes at him; reconstructing is one thing, but that's as if the killer is *in* the room with them. Even Price and Beverly look round. Will shivers, hollow as the tide pulls back and abandons him. He ducks his head, twisting his hands together in his lap. *Fuck...*

'You pick it up and can't play it, he'll put you down and play *you*,' Beverly says, drawing the focus away from Will. He's grateful; his skull is filled with razors and every movement shakes them around. He scrubs his hands over his face, wondering if it might be worth gauging out his eyes.

'He took the time to whiten the vocal chords before playing them,' Zeller says, returning to the body.

Will shakes his head and sits back.

'It's not about whitening them, it was about, er, increasing *elasticity*,' he explains. *My design...*

Beverly nods.

'He treated the vocal chords the same way you treat catgut string.' At Price's questioning eyebrows, she rolls her eyes. 'Yes, I play the violin.'

Ignoring the pain shooting through his body, Will gets up and comes closer so that he look down at his creation. At the *killer's* creation.

'This takes a steady hand,' he mutters. He wants to be useful; this discomfort has to be for something, right? 'A *confidence*... He's killed before.'

'Like this?' Price asks, but Will shakes his head.

'No, not like this... This is a skilled musician... trying a new instrument.' His shadow purrs, winding between his legs like a cat, and he lists closer to the offering...

Realizes what he's doing and pulls back, blinking to ground himself. He needs to go. Needs to... He needs to call Hannibal. Needs to *see* him.

Grimacing an apology at Beverly, Price and Zeller, Will ducks out of the office. He hurries down the hall and escapes into the first bathroom he can find, locking himself in the far cubicle and sinking down onto the seat. *That was too close...* Katz and her Betas are worried;

he can smell it in their scent, see it in the way they exchange glances when they think he isn't watching...

Will sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose to ease some of the pressure in his forehead. He's been having a *lot* of headaches recently, and they seem to be getting worse. He wants to ask Hannibal about them again, but his Alpha's already said it's just stress...

Another sigh, another face rub. Will grinds the heels of his hands into his eye sockets until colors explode over his eyelids. Just stress, nothing he can't handle... Everyone gets stressed sometimes; he doesn't need to be such an *Omega* about it.

He lets himself out of the cubicle and fills a sink with cold water, dunking his face in it to cool down. Sweat dampens his armpits and makes his shirt cling to the base of his back. They've never been able to get the heating right in this building...

He calls Hannibal on his way to the car, and the Alpha picks up after two rings.

'Hello, Will.'

Will smiles and rotates his stiff neck, a purr slipping up from his throat as warmth spreads up from his belly.

'Hannibal.'

'Is everything alright?' Hannibal asks, careful to keep his tone mild, not hungry. *Less than sixty hours... You're dependant on me, Will. Have you started hearing screams yet?*

Will hums as he unlocks his car, releasing a slow breath once he's behind the wheel.

'I just, er...' He coughs and rubs the back of his head. *I need to see you*. 'I was wondering what you know about the cello.'

***

'Among the first musical instruments were flutes,' Hannibal says, flicking through one of his history books until he finds the illustration he wants. 'Carved from human bone.' He places the book on his desk for Will to see, and taps the page with the drawing. Will pushes away from one of the mezzanine pillars and comes closer, hugging his elbows to keep from throwing himself on his Alpha. Hannibal hasn't touched him yet, just stepped back to allow him into the office, and he doesn't know if it would be welcome.

'This murder was a *performance*,' he says, biting off each word through the tension locking his jaw shut. Hannibal looks off towards the fire crackling in the hearth, his hands in his pockets so as not to assume his Omega wants contact.

'Every life is a piece of music,' he muses. 'Like music, we are finite events. Unique arrangements. Sometimes harmonious, sometimes dissonant.'

Will snorts and settles for stroking his hand across the back of Hannibal's chair, the smooth leather and faint Alpha smell making his fingertips tingle. Hannibal watches him, pleased

that Will is slowly marking each piece of furniture in the office with his own scent.

'Sometimes, not worth hearing again,' the Omega says grimly.

'He's a poet and a psychopath,' Hannibal says, quirking an eyebrow. *A rare combination*.

'And a craftsman,' Will adds. 'He was shrinking and tanning the vocal chords.'

Hannibal follows as his mate moves around the desk, hunting him step by step, both of them circling as they work together to catch the musician.

'Like turning iron wire into musical steel string,' he says. He stops and looks over at Will. 'Was there olive oil?'

Will looks back, a frown creasing his brow.

'Yes.'

Hannibal nods.

'Whatever sound he was trying to produce, it was an authentic one. Olive oil hasn't been used in the production of catgut for over a century. It was *said* to increase the life of the strings, and create a sweeter, more melodic sound.'

Will considers this, but he's already moving his head to shake.

'No... I *hear* what he was playing behind my eyes when I close them,' he says. *It wasn't melodic. It was... a mating call.*

Hannibal narrows his eyes at the way Will's pulse jumps in his throat.

'What do you see behind closed eyes?' he asks softly. Will glances at him, his face haunted. Garrett Jacob Hobbs stares at him from the audience, eyes filmed with death, skin shrunken and tattered from bullet wounds.

Will swallows.

'I... see myself,' he lies. *I see the killer I could become.*

Hannibal waits, but Will looks away, missing the glimmer in his dark eyes. *You see your dark shadow.*

'You said the killer was performing,' he says, offering Will a distraction. 'Who was he performing for?'

Will frowns; the answer is just out of reach, leaving him on his toes, aching and desperate to know.

'I don't know,' he growls. 'A patron of the arts? A fellow musician? Or... another killer?'

Hannibal tilts his head, black fire snapping in his eyes. Remembers the way his rival Alpha's hungry gaze lingered on Will... *I've been wondering when you'd strike.*

'It's a serenade,' he says quietly. Will grimaces, drawing closer to Hannibal as his skin starts to hurt; the Alpha is unhappy, angry about something. He wants to comfort him.

'This isn't *how* he kills,' he says. 'Normally, he doesn't kill for an audience.'

Hannibal looks at the floor so that his anger isn't directed to the worried Omega. He must tread carefully; with Will so close to heat, he cannot afford to scare him into the arms of another.

'And you believe he risked getting caught for a serenade?' he asks. *How very bold and daring of you, Tobias*.

'I believe he wants to *show* someone how *well* he plays,' Will says, his shadow adding a dark purr to his voice, and he jolts as it clicks into place. 'He's courting an Omega,' he whispers. ‘Someone he thinks will be *impressed* by his… *talent*.’

Hannibal looks up, his chest squeezing painfully tight around his heart at the awe in Will's voice. *Yes,* he thinks, anger raging through him, lending strength to his muscles, giving him the speed and agility he needs to fight. *He's courting you, Will.*

He growls, his eyes burning red with the urge to rut for his Omega. To fight for him. Kill for him.

Fuck... Will whimpers at the sound, his insides pulsing at the murderous look on his Alpha's face. Hannibal's lip curls back from his teeth and he strikes before Will can even see what's happening. He feels Hannibal's strong fingers in his hair, grabbing the back of his head, and then he's yanked forwards, crushed against a hard chest as the Alpha claims his mouth in a bruising kiss. Will melts against him, his shadow rearing up and crashing into the waves of darkness rolling from Hannibal, striking a match inside his chest and burning away all memory of the murder, the other Alpha... anything but *this*, the feel of Hannibal's hands on his skin, Hannibal's lips on his face, Hannibal's teeth in his neck...

'*Yesss...*' he hisses, dropping his head back to bare his throat as he clings to the other man's hips, rocking forwards to rub against him. 'Hannibal... *Hannibal*... Alpha...'

'You're mine, Will,' Hannibal says, tearing at his mate's shirt and laying his skin bare so that he can litter it with kisses, nipping and sucking until the creamy flesh blushes red. *'Say it.*'

'I'm yours,' Will gasps, stumbling backwards when Hannibal pushes him towards the desk. 'I'm yours... I'm yours.' He pulls Hannibal's face down so that he can kiss him again, dizzy with the need for Hannibal to be *inside* him. He pushes at his belt, but he can't remember how it works, and he snarls in frustration, scratching at his own belly to get it *gone*. He needs it gone, needs it away so that he can be open for his Alpha, filled up with him and stained until he's *owned*.

'Mine,' Hannibal breathes, sliding his hands down Will's front and lacing their fingers together, keeping him from hurting himself. He stares into Will's glassy blue eyes, into his wide, sightless pupils. 'I've got you.'

'Hannibal... Hannibal, in, please... please...' Will's voice cracks with desperation, the sound of it tearing at Hannibal's chest. He pulls the Omega's boxers down at the same time as his trousers, shoving everything to Will's knees before he turns and pushes him, face first, onto the polished wood of the table. Will's nails rasp across the surface and he grinds back against Hannibal's erection, trying to get the Alpha to move faster, gasping and mewling, using every sound he can think of to get Hannibal to mount him.

Please... please... this, please... Will shudders as Hannibal's warm hand rests on his backside, *so* close to his entrance, where he needs his knot. He spreads his legs as wide as they'll go when Hannibal nudges them apart, and groans out a sob at the feel of his Alpha's fingers gathering up the slick leaking out of him. He needs it... needs it... *please... please*...

Hannibal pulls his erection free of his suit, purring at the pleasure of it as he rubs hot, tingling slick over the aching length. He lines himself up, holding Will steady with a hand on the base of his back, and begins to push, his breath hitching at the moment of resistance, the *tightness* and then the sudden plunge as he breaches the ring of muscle and buries himself inside his mate's body. Will shudders again, an endless stream of whimpers and sharp breaths huffing across the tabletop, each sound tugging at Hannibal's gut, every whine a kiss to soothe his ego. He takes his Omega hard, digging his fingers into Will's hips and hauling him back onto him, rutting with dark fury at the idea of anyone else *touching* Will, let alone bonding him.

Will grinds his forehead onto the desk, crying out every time Hannibal slams into him. It's so good, so right... His skin is bruising where Hannibal holds him but there's nothing he wants more than to see every inch of his body marked by his Alpha. So, he calls for him, flexing his shoulders, sweat rolling down to settle in small of his back, his throat tightening around a high pitched whine designed to trigger a rut.

'Will...' Hannibal falls forwards, the Omega's mating call punching through his chest and taking him by the spine, hauling him down to close his lips around the sweet, burning nape of his neck. He releases Will's hips to pin his wrists, knocking the lamp, books and pens onto the floor as the desk tilts, again and again, creaking with every thrust.

Tears roll down Will's cheeks when the Alpha touches his nape. He's coming, he's coming... *Fuck...* Pleasure breaks him apart, shattering him into red and gold, his ears ringing. He bears down to take Hannibal's growing knot as far as he can, muscles eager to pull his seed deep. Screws his eyes tight as he judders, locked in place, grey spots swarming because he can't remember how to breathe.

Hannibal snarls again, Will's body squeezing him almost hard enough to hurt. Everything tightens and he scratches deep welts into the Omega's forearms as he spills his release inside his body. He turns his head just in time to bite down into Will's uninjured shoulder, his growls rumbling through the silent office when blood pours from the wound. *Nobody else can touch you, Will.*

'Mine,' he whispers, speaking into the torn flesh before he licks it clean, kissing it and sucking down the coppery taste of his partner.

Will hums, lying perfectly still beneath him, smiling when Hannibal begins to purr. He twines their fingers together and sighs, rolling his head down to bare his nape for his Alpha.

'Yours.'

***

When Franklyn comes to see him for an impromptu therapy session two days later, he is beside himself with worry.

'Do you remember when I said that Tobias was saying very dark things?' he says, blurting it out before Hannibal has even had a chance to sit. Hannibal, however, doesn't allow his irritation to show, and merely twitches an eyebrow as he unbuttons his jacket to take his seat.

'I made note of it,' he replies, crossing one long leg over the other. Franklyn nods, sweat beading on his forehead.

'Well, he said he wanted to... cut someone's throat and play it like a violin,' he says, his voice shaking. He sits forwards, eyes bright with tears. 'They *found* somebody, whose throat had been *cut* and played like a violin!'

Hannibal regards him, dark eyes betraying nothing of the anger still burning inside at the idea of the other Alpha's display.

'So, you think Tobias killed that man at the symphony?' he asks.

'I don't know!' Franklyn searches the walls for answers, his shoulders hunching as the undeniable truth bears down upon him. He sighs. 'If I *do*... do I have to report it?'

'Do you have a reason not to?' Hannibal says. It would certainly make things easier if Tobias were simply arrested.

'What if I'm *wrong*?' Franklyn whines, so desperate to believe the best in his mate. Hannibal tilts his head, denying him the comfort.

'What if you're right?'

'I'm *always* wrong,' Franklyn says, giving a wide shrug. He whines and rubs damp palms against his trouser legs. 'I don't know... why would he *say* something like that to me?'

'Why do you think?' Hannibal asks quietly, and he watches cold realization creep over the Beta's face. Franklyn tries to wet his lips but his tongue is too dry. All he can do is stare at the floor, lost to the shadows of his mind.

"Cos he knows I'd tell you.'

And he wants me to know, Hannibal thinks. *He's challenging me for Will.*

***

In ancient times, an Alpha had no choice but to challenge another and fight to the death for an Omega; it was a necessary part of the courting ritual, designed to ensure that only strong genes were pass on. Despite modern society's aversion to such *overt* displays of violence, Alpha on Alpha killings, either as a dominance challenge or for the right to mate with an Omega, is not treated as murder. Hannibal knows this, and, as he steps up to the Chordophone strings and cello shop, he thinks Tobias might be counting on it as well.

Catching the bell over the door on the way to ensure he can enter, unheard, Hannibal pauses to listen to the lilting, swaying notes of the violin coming from the back of the shop. It speaks of longing, filled with hope and determination... Feelings towards Will, perhaps? Black fire surges in his chest, and he feels his eyes itch as they pulse red.

He moves, unnoticed, into the shop, and the music continues. His scent, however, announces his arrival, and the playing swiftly stops. The air stirs, and soft, controlled footsteps approach. Hannibal looks up to see the other Alpha in the doorway, all dark, smooth skin and sharp, calculating eyes, holding a violin in one hand, a bow in the other.

'You're Franklyn's therapist; Dr Lecter,' he says, by way of introductions. Then, because it would be rude not to; 'Nice to see you again.'

His voice is flat; monotonous. Devoid of emotion, just as he is.

'Is it Tobias?' Hannibal asks, as if he doesn't already know.

'Yes.'

Yes, you are... Hannibal thinks. *I'm going to feed Will your heart.*

'Your strings are all gut,' he says, gesturing to the instruments around him.

'I also carry steel and polymer strings, if you prefer,' Tobias says, his voice laced with disdain at the very idea of playing with anything but gut. He moves to return his violin to its case by the cash register as he speaks, and Hannibal follows.

'I prefer gut,' he replies. 'Harps strung with gut still make music after two thousand years.' He plucks a cello as he speaks, its bass note ringing out in the tense, crackling silence.

'I didn't hear you ring the bell,' Tobias says. Hannibal tilts his head.

'I didn't want you to stop playing,' he says, somewhat truthfully. 'Was it an original composition?'

'Something I've been writing,' Tobias replies. He fixes Hannibal with his curious, cold stare. 'Do you compose?'

'I discover,' Hannibal says, and he begins to close the distance. 'Can't impose traditional composition on an instrument that's inherently freeform.'

Tobias narrows his eyes.

'What instrument would that be?'

'The Theremin,' Hannibal says. 'It can generate *any* pitch throughout its range, even those between conventional notes.'

'Hm... So can a violin, or a trombone,' Tobias replies, and his dark shadow draws its lips back to snarl. He is all but *throwing* it in Hannibal's face. *I did it. I killed that man and left him displayed for Will to see. To understand. My gift to him.*

Hannibal considers him. Considers the threat. Considers Tobias's strength and speed.

'It seems we're both comfortable playing between conventional notes,' he says lightly, and Tobias narrows his cold eyes again, because he knows that Hannibal knows, but he is also aware that they are too evenly matched.

You believe we are, anyway, Hannibal thinks, and adjusts his energy just slightly, so as not to appear overly threatening. An older, warier Alpha.

'I hear the symphony's looking for a new trombonist,' he says.

'Altogether *horrible* what happened,' Tobias muses, moving from behind the counter to circle Hannibal, effectively putting himself between the rival Alpha and the door. Even if he isn't quite ready to attack, he's not about to let Hannibal leave. Not yet.

'Not *altogether*,' Hannibal replies, turning so that he always keeps Tobias in his line of sight. 'It's an unfortunate way to leave the symphony, yes, but I can't help thinking the orchestra will be better for it.'

'At least the brass section,' Tobias quips, with a smug flick of his head, and Hannibal's darkness growls. *Reckless. You could never protect my Will.*

However, he forces himself to smile, playing along, and Tobias relishes in his own self-gratulation.

'What brings you here looking for gut?' he asks brightly.

'My harpsichord needs new strings,' Hannibal replies, stepping closer again. 'It's making an *awful* noise.' Time to extend the invitation. 'Perhaps you could help.'

***

Fifty-four hours, nine minutes, seven seconds…

Will tries to ignore the squirming, gnawing pain in his gut, hunched over his desk in front of the big window as night falls outside, creating a new set of lures for the local trout. It's been just over two days since he saw Hannibal; since the Alpha *fucked* him across his *desk*. Since he smothered him with his scent and sank his teeth into his shoulder, tearing the flesh and

marking him, seven inches too far from where he *should* have been bitten. Where he *needed* to be bitten…

The silence is oppressive; all-consuming, a deafening reminder of how very *alone* he is. The back of his neck prickles but he refuses to stop and check it – this part of the lure creation is delicate, and his skin is just sensitive today, the material of even his softest jersey sweater grating across his nape like a steel comb. His body can't decide if it's hot or cold, so he's wearing a gilet over the top, but he's rolled his sleeves up. The back of his hair is damp with sweat, but every now and then, a shiver wracks him.

Creating lures is normally relaxing. Some dark satisfaction in knowing that he's crafting something that's going to take a life. *My design…*

I wish Hannibal was here.

The thought cuts him, and Will has to work hard to keep his hands steady as he winds the thread tight around the end. It's like a knife between the ribs, piercing his heart and making it skip a beat. The back of his neck screams and his insides cramp as he clenches around *nothing*.

Will breathes slowly, counting the number of times he winds the thread. Squashes the feelings down as he calmly reaches for the little scissors and –

A scratching sound catches his attention. He stops and looks over towards the fireplace. The dogs are all lying in their baskets around the mantlepiece, as close to the heater as they can, but the sound isn't coming from them.

An animal chirrups. There's more scratching. Something's stuck… There's an animal trapped in his chimney. The knife in his heart cuts deeper and Will gets up, stepping over the dog beds to bend under the mantlepiece, peering up into the darkness.

It's trapped. There's something trapped, scared, possibly *hurt*, and Will has to get it out. He has to. *Has to.*

He has to get it out, *now*.

Two hours later, there's a gaping hole in his chimney breast, brick dust all over the lounge and a worried Alana Bloom hovering behind him.

'What kind of animal *was* it?' she asks, frowning at his rescue attempts.

'It, er, might've been a raccoon,' Will replies. He can't bring himself to turn around and face her; her scent is laced with worry, adding a salty tang to her sweet caramel tone. He's sweating from the effort of smashing open the chimney breast; he can feel his sweater sticking to the base of his back.

'"Might've been?"' Alana asks, and she *definitely* sounds worried, now. Will huffs a bitter laugh.

‘By the time I’d knocked a hole in the chimney, it climbed out the top,’ he explains, turning his head half towards her without looking at her face. From the corner of his eye, he sees her shift awkwardly, her hands rammed deep into the pockets of her red coat.

‘Well… at least it got out,’ she offers, and Will nods. Then he frowns and turns to look at her, fiddling with the hammer still in his hands.

‘What are *you* doing out?’ he asks, the itching of his eyes suggesting it’s too late to be a social call. Itching eyes must be because he’s tired, which means it must be late.

‘I thought I’d come over, make some noise… shoo away any predators at your door,’ Alana replies, watching as Will nods and wanders back towards the broken chimney breast. ‘Looks like you’re making *plenty* of noise all by yourself.’

Will frowns at this, at the obviousness of the lie, and carefully sets the hammer down on the dust and broken plaster-strewn mantlepiece.

‘You’ve avoided being in a room alone with me… essentially since I *met* you,’ he says, turning to face her and then drawing closer, a moth to a flame. Heat rolls through his body, sending tingles racing from his scalp down to his fingertips, and he can *taste* her scent on his tongue, on the glands in the roof of his mouth… He wants to taste *her*…

‘You were smooth about it,’ he continues, dipping his head to move past her, forcing her to turn so that her scent rises in the air again. He wants to show her the nape of his neck; is it flushed? It feels hot and swollen… *aching* to be bitten…

I trust you. You could bond me… If he won’t… I need it…

Alana grins, a pale blush rising across her smooth cheeks.

‘Evidently not smooth *enough*,’ she replies, tracking him as the Omega closes the distance further. Does he always smell this good? Like open fields, fresh cakes and lazy summer evenings… *Like home*…

‘And now you’re making *house-calls*,’ Will says, holding the back of his jeans in a desperate attempt to keep from grabbing Alana up and sucking the breath from her in a hungry kiss. She smells *so* good and he’s *so* close…

‘Just a drive-by on my way home,’ Alana replies, and Will can’t help but glance at the chimney again – *I have to get it out* – before he’s drawn back to the Beta, drowning in the crystal blue of her eyes, the softness of her face and the *kindness* in her lips.

I miss you…

‘Since you’re not my patient,’ Alana adds, savoring the sweet, vanilla musk smell pouring out of Will. She doesn’t get much of a chance to see him when he’s not smothering himself in Beta spray… He should leave it off more often… She leans closer, marveling at how *bright* the coppery gold is around the edges of his blue eyes, how soft his brown curls look… the heat radiating from his body… Practically *edible*…

‘No… I’m *not*,’ Will agrees, his breath catching at the desire on Alana’s face.

You want me… You’ve always wanted me… You can have me… Take me…Bond me…

He dips his head, reaching out to cup the side of her face and stroke his thumb over her cheek, copying his own favorite gesture. Alana is so warm and so *here*; so comforting. There’s mint on her breath as they share the air in the space between them. Her hair is silky soft and smells like roses; it slips through his fingers like water, leaving a trace of her scent on his skin in its wake. *I’m sorry, Hannibal…*

Alana lifts her face to meet him and then Will’s kissing her, his hot lips meeting hers, his scent in her nose and his hair beneath her hand as she slides her fingers through his curls, massaging his hairline because he’s an Omega and it will feel good to him and he smells *so* unbelievably good when he’s aroused…

Will snatches air in the half second they’re apart and then he kisses her again; their lips meet in perfect synchronization, giving and taking in turns, heads tilting and scents rising, thickening with the musk of desire. *This… this…*

And then Alana hesitates, ducking her head and placing her hands on Will’s shoulders to slow him down as he sways closer, trying to touch all of her, and the pain of it makes his blood run cold. *No…*

‘I’m confused,’ Alana mumbles, but she can’t help but slip her hands down, rubbing her palms over Will’s hard chest. The heat is pouring off him and her gut tightens, liquid fire pooling in her belly before sliding lower, making her ache for him.

‘You need to *stop* thinking so much,’ Will purrs, nuzzling her forehead so that he can soak up the smell of her. He *needs* this… Needs a mate… *Now*…

‘I can stop the thinking if we’re not…’ Alana mutters, her heart skipping a beat at the low whine catching in Will’s throat. ‘… but if we’re…’

‘Intimate,’ Will whispers, drawing back just enough that Alana can look into his eyes. Blue on blue; endless oceans of *need*.

‘The way that I am in relationships…’ Alana tries again. ‘Not that this is a relationship; it’s just a kiss – a *great* kiss – but I…’ She trails off as Will whines again, still stroking her cheek, trying to encourage another kiss. She swallows, guilt dampening her arousal. ‘The way that I am isn’t compatible with…’

‘With the way *I* am,’ Will finishes, almost growling it. *Because I’m a fucking Omega*.

‘I wouldn’t be good for you,’ Alana says, and the moment shatters, icy nails scratching at Will’s nape, hurting so much he has to grit his teeth against the sound of pain his body wants to make. Alana misinterprets it as frustration, and continues, ‘You wouldn’t be good for me. And I wouldn’t be able to stop *analyzing* because I have this *professional curiosity* about you…’

‘I am *not* your *patient*…’ Will growls. He can’t deal with the pain. The cold. He kisses her again, chasing the heat dwindling in his body. The touch of her lips fires him up again and he deepens the kiss, every *inch* of him buzzing at the touch of her tongue on his…

And then Alana breaks the touch and ducks her head again, putting space between them.

‘If *I* were my patient,’ she says, doubt and regret clouding her eyes when she looks at him. ‘My advice to me… would be *don’t* do this.’ She grimaces. ‘I have to follow my own advice.’

She can *see* how much it hurts him, but Will nods. Chews his lip and nods again to show that he understands; that he accepts her decision, even as a whimper claws at his throat. *I need you…*

‘I’m gonna go ahead and go now,’ Alana continues, her eyes bright with tears at the pain she’s causing him. ‘Goodnight, Will.

Fear locks him in place as Alana pulls away from him. Will forces himself to nod once more – he doesn’t want her to feel guilty, it’s not her fault he’s so lonely. He can’t help but watch as she heads out into the night, leaving him alone again. *Vulnerable. Rejected. Unmated.*

Fire chases ice up and down his spine, stabbing him in the gut, his teeth chattering as he shakes, his jeans sticking to slick-wet thighs.

He looks over at the chimney. At the gaping wound in the brickwork. The missing pieces.

He needs Hannibal.

***

‘More wine?’

Hannibal rises and moves around the dining table, picking up the carafe and swirling it to release the flavor before leaning over Tobias’s place setting and topping up his glass.

‘A late harvest Vidal from Linden,’ he explains, ignoring the way Tobias watches his every move.

‘Oh, Virginia,’ the rival Alpha says, aiming for polite, sophisticated conversation. ‘I thought it was French.’

That’s because you’re a snob, Hannibal thinks, though he merely offers Tobias a small, tight-lipped smile.

‘The Virginia wine revolution is upon us,’ he jokes, returning to his seat. Then, growing serious, ‘I apologize for being so blunt, Tobias, but I have to ask: did you kill that trombonist?’

Tobias tilts his head, cold eyes narrowing.

‘Do you really have to ask?’

‘No; just changing the subject,’ Hannibal replies. Tobias’s eyes flash red.

‘Franklyn gave you my message.’

Hannibal smooths sauce from his knife onto his fork, choosing his words carefully.

‘The murder is being investigated by the FBI,’ he says mildly. ‘They’re going to find you.’

‘Let them,’ Tobias sneers. Hannibal raises an eyebrow at him, raising his fork to his mouth.

‘You want to get caught?’

‘I want them to *try*,’ Tobias says. ‘They may investigate me because I own a string shop. They’ll send men to investigate and I’ll kill them. Then I’ll find Franklyn and kill him. Then I would disappear.’

Hannibal chews thoughtfully and then swallows his mouthful. He reaches for his wine, holding it up by the stem and inspecting the honey colored wine.

‘Don’t kill Franklyn,’ he says lightly, taking a drink to accompany the mouthful of crab. The flavors melt beautifully onto his tongue; he only wishes his dinner guest was someone more… pleasant.

‘But I’ve been looking forward to it,’ Tobias whines. He sits forwards, locking eyes with Hannibal, allowing hunger to sharpen his voice as he adds, ‘Actually, I was going to kill *you, and* your Omega.’

‘Of course you were,’ Hannibal replies. He doesn’t feign surprise; it would be insulting. Doesn’t allow his rage to show in his even tone. ‘We’re lean. Lean animals yield the toughest gut, and I’m a rival Alpha.’ He watches the way Tobias’s jaw tightens at the acknowledgement. At the lack of fear. ‘What stopped you from wanting to kill us?’ Hannibal continues, returning to his dinner. ‘Or *have* you stopped?’

‘I stopped wanting to kill *him* when I followed you one night, out of town,’ Tobias replies, and Hannibal slows eating at the unease coiling in his stomach. ‘To a lonely road… to a *bus* yard…’

Tobias leans forwards, his eyes burning crimson as he stares deep into Hannibal’s dark, impenetrable gaze. His shadow reaches across the table, merging and melding with Hannibal’s darkness. A snake and a dragon, coiling together…

‘I thought; if he accepts *you*… *Well*… That’s the perfect Omega for me.’

Hannibal allows a growl to deepen his voice and his darkness pulls back, gathering itself in preparation for an attack. They are not alike, not even *slightly*, and Will is so much *better* than this impudent *child*.

‘You’re reckless, Tobias.’

‘I’m not going to tell anyone what I saw you do, and do *well*,’ Tobias replies, sitting back in his chair, satisfied that he’s unnerved Hannibal. He thinks he has the upper hand, which makes him cocky. He watches as Hannibal takes another sip of wine, and can’t help but add, ‘So my *recklessness* doesn’t concern you.’

‘It *concerns* me because you won’t be drawing attention just to yourself,’ Hannibal replies, rising and moving to the dresser. *You’ll be drawing attention to me, and to Will, and I won’t allow that*.

Tobias stands as well, tension thrumming through him until the room crackles with it; a whispered echo of a primal roar.

‘I could use a mate. Someone who understands me,’ he says, meeting Hannibal square in the eyes. ‘Someone who… *thinks* like I do and can see the world and the people *in* it the way I do.’

‘I know *exactly* how you feel,’ Hannibal replies, meeting the challenge without flinching. ‘But Will is *mine*.’ He turns away, proving his greater strength by showing Tobias his back. *I have nothing to fear from you.*

‘Tell me; why did you invite me here for dinner?’ Tobias asks, baring containing the growl at Hannibal’s rebuff. ‘It wasn’t just to restring your harpsichord.’

‘I was going to kill *you*,’ Hannibal says simply, and Tobias immediately looks at his plate. Hannibal sniffs a laugh. ‘I didn’t poison you, Tobias; I wouldn’t do that to the food.’

The silence thickens between them. Two sets of eyes lock onto each other. Muscles tighten, coiled, ready to spring.

Any… moment… N-

The doorbell chimes, but neither look away from each other. They can’t.

‘Expecting someone?’ Tobias asks.

‘No,’ Hannibal replies. He hears the click as the front door begins to open. That can only mean one person, and that that one person is *very* upset. So, he risks an attack to his flank because *Tobias doesn’t matter right now*, abandoning his rival and striding into the entrance hall.

Will all but falls through the front door, his coat already off so that he can shake snow from the sleeve. He’s sweating and shaking, his cheeks flushed and eyes bright. He needs Hannibal; needs his scent, needs his seed, needs his teeth.

Needs his forgiveness.

Hannibal feels a jolt in the base of his spine when he sees Will. He can *taste* his musk, thick with desire, heavy with prodromal hormones. What happened to him?

He doesn’t have long to wonder; Will speaks the moment he looks up and sees him.

‘I kissed Alana Bloom,’ the Omega says, his voice shaking. He’s already bowing his head, baring his throat to his Alpha in a submissive gesture designed to placate him, and he tosses his coat to the side, oblivious to Hannibal’s distaste for such mess, before going straight past him and into the dining room.

Hannibal turns, schooling his features so as not to betray his worry, despite everything in him screaming his need to protect his Omega, his mate.

‘Well, come in…’ he says, turning and following close behind, ready to defend him if Tobias is still inside. He doubts it, but one can never be too careful. Fortunately, the younger Alpha is not as foolhardy as his recklessness suggests, and has slipped away into the night, no doubt to plan his attack at a more convenient time.

Will’s insides are churning, and his nape is on fire. He can’t stop shivering, even though his blood is boiling in his veins. He can hear his heart thundering in his ears, feel his pulse in his fingertips, his throat… *I need you. I need this. I can’t be alone anymore…*

He slows when he sees two place setting, guilt flooding him. *Fuck… I’m ruining his evening…* Jealousy snaps at its heels, and he has the insane, irrational urge to spin and grab his Alpha by the throat, slam him back against the wall and bite at his face, *demand* to know who he was eating with that wasn’t Will.

‘You have a guest?’ he asks, glaring at the offending chair before glancing at the back door, frowning because it’s open and leaking cool air into the room. A guest that has just gone?

‘A colleague,’ Hannibal replies, slipping past him to check the garden. Empty. Good. ‘You just missed him.’

The savage beast inside Will rumbles its acceptance; soothed, for now. He tries to focus on the details of the scene, forcing his thoughts through syrup. The rich, heavy musk of two Alphas, half-eaten food, the half-drunk wine… His frown deepens.

‘He didn’t finish his dinner,’ he mutters. He feels drunk. Is he drunk? Is he sleepwalking?

‘An urgent call of some sort,’ Hannibal replies, closing and locking the doors. ‘He had to leave suddenly.’

Will nods, flicking his eyes from side to side, trying to control his racing heart. He can barely breathe… *Please, Hannibal… Alpha… Please touch me. Tell me it’s okay… Tell me I’m yours…*

Hannibal comes closer and offers Will a genuine, if deliberately sly, smile. The Omega smells *delicious*; a perfect accompaniment to the rich bread pudding and tart fruit he is about to serve. Desperation and panic looks good on Will; it brings out his vulnerability, and Hannibal is nothing if not a predator. And, he reasons, Will *did* allow someone else to touch him; it seems only fair that he be punished for a while. Aloud, though, he simply continues,

‘This benefits you, because I have dessert for two.’

He strides past his mate into the kitchen and the Omega whines softly as his Alpha denies him a touch. Will follows immediately and crosses his arms in an uncomfortable attempt to hug himself, keeping the kitchen counter between them because Hannibal has given no indication that he forgives him his trespass.

‘Tell me; what was Alana’s reaction?’ Hannibal asks, picking up a towel with which to carefully remove the dish of puddings from the oven.

Will fidgets, shifting from foot to foot, uncomfortably aware of his *slick* his thighs are, how sticky everything is from the fire raging in his belly. He’s drowning in fear; fear that Hannibal won’t care, that he will continue to be indifferent to Will’s affair, or that he *will* care and reject him for it. Cast him aside for a worthier mate…

‘She said she wouldn’t be good for me, and I wouldn’t be good for her,’ he says, pacing back and forth in a vain attempt to work off some of the stress.

‘I don’t disagree,’ Hannibal replies, busying himself with serving up the puddings, denying Will even eye contact. Perhaps he should enforce celibacy for a few weeks, just to enhance the strength of Will’s eventual heat… ‘Even if she *could* satisfy your need for an Alpha, she would feel an obligation to her field of study to observe you, and *you* would resent her for it.’

‘I know,’ Will frets, hands on his hips, frowning at the floor tiles as if they hold the answers. Not looking at Hannibal, because he knows, he *knows* what’s about to come next, and dreading it. Hannibal, of course, does not disappoint; does not shy away from his curiosity.

‘I’m wondering, then, why you kissed her, *and* felt compelled to drive an hour in the snow to tell *me* about it,’ he says, moving to fetch cream from the fridge. Will sighs, still pacing back and forth.

‘I wanted to kiss her since I met her; she’s *very* kissable.’

Hannibal grins; it’s true, though she’s not *nearly* as kissable as Will. However, instead of saying this, he merely carries the chilled bowl to the plates to finish dishing up.

‘You waited a long time, which suggests you were kissing her for a reason,’ he persists. ‘In addition to wanting to.’ He glances up at Will and waits. *Were you missing me, Will?*

Will hesitates, chewing his lip before answering.

‘I heard an animal trapped in my chimney,’ he admits. ‘Erm…’ Hannibal’s patient stare, paused midway through scooping up cream, is unnerving, but he can’t *not* tell his Alpha the truth. ‘I broke through the wall to get it out… I didn’t *find* anything inside…’ Hannibal adds cream to the top of the puddings, and Will continues, ‘Alana showed up, she… looked at me…’ His voice begins to shake again. Another lip chew, his brow creased with worry. ‘Maybe her face changed, I don’t know, but, um…’ He tries to swallow around the lump in his throat, feeling sweat slide down his back to soak through the waistband of his boxers. ‘She… she *knew*…’

Hannibal is careful not to let his face show any of the pain that Will's fear is causing him; he keeps his eyes on his preparation when Will shakes his head, twitching with tension.

'What did she know, Will?' he asks softly, arranging delicate, edible flowers on top of the cream.

'There was *no* animal in the chimney,' Will says, *hating* the tears he can feel in his eyes. 'It was only… in my *head*.'

Hannibal glances at him, watching weeks of hard work begin to blossom. The first fracture in Will's psyche is painful to him, terrifying in its potential, but it is an essential part of the struggle that will make him so strong. So powerful. *My killer… my mate. Let go of your old life, Will. Let go of everything holding you back*.

He doesn't say anything, just continues sprinkling flowers. Will shoves his hands into his pockets and comes closer, ducking his head because he's afraid he'll make the Alpha angry with what he's about to say.

'I sleepwalk… I get headaches… I am *hearing* things…' His voice wobbles and drops to barely more than a whisper. 'I feel… *unstable*.'

Hannibal, now silently stirring a fruit compote, looks at his mate, at the Omega who is so *desperately* seeking comfort from him. But he *can't*, not yet. He needs to push just a little more, to widen the crack so that Will can become his true self. He must be strong for Will.

'That's why you kissed her; a clutch for balance,' he says, and is rewarded by a half shrug of agreement from the trembling man. 'You said yourself; what you do is not good for you.'

Will looks away, grinding his back teeth together.

'Unfortunately, *I* am good for *it*.'

Hannibal finishes drizzling the sauce onto the desserts as he speaks.

'Are you still hearing this killer's serenade behind your eyes?'

Will huffs a bitter laugh.

'Well, it's *our* song,' he says, and Hannibal has to fight very hard not to bare his teeth in a snarl. Instead, he simply hands Will the plate of food, his chest tickling with a purr as his mate gives a sad, tired smile of thanks and accepts it. Then, as he folds up the tea towel, he has an idea. *You don't have a song with Tobias; you have a song with me.*

'I… hesitate in telling you this,' he begins, feigning uncertainty in order to appeal to Will's sympathy. 'As it borders on a violation of doctor-patient confidentiality.' Looks up to see Will waiting, still scared, still seeking comfort and reassurance from his mate. *Just a little longer.* 'A patient told me today; he suspects a friend of his may be involved with the murder at the symphony.' He sighs, as though the decision weighs on him; in truth, he has never felt lighter. Sending Will after Tobias; knowing that *his* Omega will be the one to kill the rival Alpha… He suppresses a shiver of pleasure at the idea.

The murder… right… No time to wallow in his own slip towards insanity. Will puts the plate down and scrubs his face, grinding his palms into his eyes.

‘Right… erm…’ He shakes his head, trying to think through the fog. He’s so *hot* and the air is so *thick*… But he needs to concentrate… ‘Erm… what did he say about his friend?’

‘He owns a music store in Baltimore,’ Hannibal replies. ‘Specializing in string instruments.’ He watches Will’s shadow rise behind eyes, smells the smokiness it adds to his scent, and his own darkness croons to it. ‘Perhaps you should interview him,’ he suggests.

And then, perhaps you should kill him.

‘Yeah…’ Will nods, and Hannibal looks down to hide the hungry gleam in his eyes. He gestures towards the pudding.

‘Eat.’

Will snorts a laugh at the Alpha’s command, but he obediently picks up his fork and cuts through the dessert, taking a bite as instructed. The bread pudding melts onto his tongue; sweet and rich and tangy, layers upon layers of flavor, aromatic in the back of his nose so that the taste lingers even after he’s swallowed. He looks up at Hannibal, his eyes widening in surprise at how much he has packed into what seems like a simple dish.

‘*Mmm*. This is delicious.’

‘Thank you,’ Hannibal replies, inclining his head with a small, self-satisfied smile. It grows when Will takes another bite and makes another moaning sound of appreciation. After all, Will needs to keep his strength up for his approaching heat.

He leads them through into the dining room and replaces the unfinished dinner plates with dessert, pouring Will a fresh glass of wine to enjoy with the pudding. His Omega is all but twitching with the tension running through him, though he can see that Will is making an effort to eat slowly and enjoy every bite, if for no other reason than because Hannibal, his Alpha, went to the effort of cooking it. *Providing for him.*

He lets Will suffer for a while longer, relishing his control over him, and then breaks the silence. Sets his fork and spoon down, the sound of metal against china catching Will’s immediate attention.

‘Tell me,’ he says, clasping his hands before him and looking straight into Will’s copper-ringed eyes. The Inhibitor drops are working well. ‘How did you think I’d react to you kissing Alana Bloom?’

Will’s breath hitches and his heart squeezes out an extra, painful thump. Sweat beads on his forehead, but not from the heat ricocheting through his body. Fear snatches his words; he looks down at the demolished dessert, his hands shaking where he’s holding his cutlery. Tries to speak, but nothing comes out of his parted lips.

‘Will?’

At Hannibal's prompt, Will glances up. He can feel himself blush, but he doesn't let himself look away again. Hannibal deserves better.

'I…' He wets his lips. Swallows. 'I wasn't sure…'

'You said you felt unstable,' Hannibal says, reaching for his wine glass, taking a slow, deliberate sip of the Vidal. 'Perhaps you were seeking stability from more than just a kiss.'

'I didn't do it to make you jealous,' Will says quickly. 'It just… happened.' He sighs, pinching his nose in frustration. Why can't he *think*? His brain is melting in his skull. Even his bones are on fire… 'I… I wanted *you*,' he confesses, and when he sighs again, he's certain the air ripples in front of him. 'I missed *you*.'

'I know,' Hannibal says quietly. He stands up and comes closer, allowing Will to lean sideways and nuzzle into his waistcoat. 'And you came to find me.'

The current rises within him, sucking the tide out in his head. Is he going to pass out? Will tips out of the chair as darkness reaches for him, his hair plastered to his scalp. Sweat runs like tears down his cheeks and his insides pulse, spilling tingling slick into his boxers.

'Alpha…'

Hannibal grabs him as the Omega falls at him. Will's pupils are wide and sightless; the copper around his blue irises burns bright, fighting to become the gold that it should be. Will whimpers, snuggling closer, unable to find words as the prodrome takes over. His scent rises, sweet musk thick with arousal, and Hannibal groans at the idea of how *good* he would smell if he weren't on suppressants.

'Will, Will, look at me,' he whispers, cupping each side of his Omega's face, ignoring the way Will claws at his suit jacket, arching his spine and whining, rubbing his erection on Hannibal's thigh as they stand up together. Hannibal purrs, stroking through Will's wet hair, pushing it back from his face and drinking in the sight of his flushed cheeks and swollen lips. 'Can you hear me?'

'Alpha…' Will forces himself to nod; if he nods, does what his Alpha wants, Hannibal will mate him. Bond him. Own him. *Please… please…*

Hannibal slides his hands down to Will's throat, one hand holding him in a choke even as he squeezes his nape with the other. Will goes rigid, locked in place by Hannibal's manipulation, panting for breath because it feels so, *so* good but he can't come because it's not the right pressure point, and his Alpha hasn't told him he can…

All he can do is listen; listen to the dark, velvety words that flow from Hannibal's lips into his mind, his Alpha's breath tickling his skin and lips sending electric jolts through him every time they brush his ear.

You won't remember this…

He's left alone, *hurting* because Hannibal isn't touching him, and he cries at the prick of a needle, but then his Alpha's hands are on him again, his mouth is on his and it's *so* good, so *right* and he's crying with the need for Hannibal to be even closer. And Hannibal is there, he's *there* for him, he's taking care of him.

Will's legs are heavy, and he stumbles twice whilst following Hannibal up to his bedroom. He purrs when his Alpha lies him down, *so* carefully, across the bed, crawling up to cover him with his bigger, stronger body, protecting him from the world.

'I've got you,' Hannibal whispers, stroking his cheek, unbuttoning his shirt, kissing him over and over and over until the fire is too much and the darkness is laced with gold and he can't… he *can't* hold on anymore… 'Let go, Will. Just let go.'

I trust you, Will thinks, nodding even as numb arms come up to hold on tight to his Alpha. He sees Hannibal's lips move again, shudders as Hannibal's hand slips around to manipulate his neck, and then…

I'm yours…

Hannibal watches as the last vestiges of conscious thought leave Will. He continues to massage the Omega's nape, releasing dopamine and heat hormones until Will cries with the need for release. He peels his damp cotton shirt from glistening muscles, dipping his head to kiss the drop of blood oozing up from the needle mark in his elbow, purring to reassure his mate as Will continues to whimper. Pulls Will's trousers and slick-soaked boxers down quivering thighs, kicking off his own shoes and socks and then removing Will's, adding everything to the growing pile on the floor.

'You're so strong,' he whispers, settling between Will's thighs so that he can rock down against the Omega's hardness. Will's answering whimper tears at his heart, and he rolls the tension from his shoulders, allowing Will's arousal to wash away the regret of what's to come for his mate. 'You have so much potential, Will… So much greatness in you…'

Reaching down between them, he gathers up some of the sweet, smoky-tasting slick leaking from his mate's body, licking his fingers clean to savor the change in his flavor. *No longer innocent… still perfect…*

He stares down into Will's sightless eyes, into pupils blown so wide there's barely a ring of coppery blue left around the black. His own blaze red and he snarls, the growl changing to a deep, satisfied purr when the Omega rolls his head back, baring his throat in total surrender. He nudges Will's arms up above his head, smiling when Will crosses his wrists, arching his spine and drawing his knees up.

'*Mine*,' he rumbles, and the Omega nods.

Hannibal sits back and takes hold of himself, lining himself up to enter his mate's eager, waiting body. Will balls his hands into fists, but he doesn't lower his arms – his Alpha put him in this position, and he is *entirely* Hannibal's. He isn't aware enough to feel self-conscious of the tears rolling down his cheeks, of the wobbling lower lip and mewling sobs bubbling up from his throat as the Alpha slides inside him, torturously slowly, making him

take every inch and *wait*. Hannibal's gut tightens at the blisteringly hot vice around him, at the smell of Will, the sight of his submission… his helplessness…

He moves slowly, reverently stroking Will's hard muscles and soft hair, rasping his thumbs over the Omega's stubble and tipping Will's head to the side so that he can suck up the salty sweat just below his ear. He nibbles at the tender flesh as he rolls his hips, pleasure stabbing almost painfully at him at the delicious sounds his mate is making.

'You're mine, Will,' he whispers, easing Will's arms down so that the Omega can hug him, pressing their bodies flush to each other as Will wraps arms and legs tight around him, bearing down as though afraid to let Hannibal go.

'Yours,' the Omega promises, his voice breaking as he shudders at the feel of Hannibal inside him. 'Yours, yours… Alpha, yours…'

'Hannibal,' Hannibal breathes, kissing him to soothe the sting of the rebuke. He starts to move faster, his heart racing in his chest, nose buried in the crook of Will's hot neck as he chases the climax threatening to break him apart. So good… so *right*…

'Hannibal,' Will gasps, his nails scratching welts across the Alpha's shoulders. He's coming, coming, coming… He convulses, spilling boiling seed across both of their bellies, clenching around the Alpha's growing knot as Hannibal begins to come. 'Hannibal… *Hannibal*…'

Hannibal's orgasm comes slowly, washing through him like white light, filling every fiber of his body with pleasure. He groans softly at how *pure* it feels, still rocking his hips, spilling his seed as deep inside his mate's body as he possibly can, boneless and content as Will continues to cling to him, too lost in the heat prodrome to feel sated for more than a moment.

He kisses Will's cheeks, his nose, his forehead, rubbing circles in the sweat shining between his pectorals. Over his heart. He smiles down at the blind eyes, at the raw, banal core of Will Graham, at the bared teeth and the shadow roaring its desperate need for violence… For blood.

Hannibal swallows the lump forming in his throat and kisses Will, *so* gently, on the lips.

'I love you.'

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When he wakes in Hannibal's arms the next morning, Will can't remember how he got there. He lies very still for a while, piecing together the last eight hours, trying not to get distracted with the silky sheets under him, or the warmth of his Alpha's naked body pressed up against his back. Hannibal's chest hair is soft but it still rasps against his shoulder blades; his skin hums, oversensitive as though he's been burned, or beaten. He's exhausted; he must have slept, because he's woken up, but apparently it wasn't good sleep. He feels ill. Is he coming down with something?

What *happened* last night? He'd been at home, just him and the dogs, in the quiet making fishing lures… He'd been thinking about Hannibal and then…

He'd heard an animal trapped in his chimney. He'd heard it and the need to rescue it, to set it free, had been *overwhelming*. He'd grabbed a hammer and…

Will frowns, cold fear coiling in his gut. Has to ground himself for a moment in the thick, heavy musky of Hannibal's scent on the pillow beneath his head, on the quilt, on his skin…

It was only in my head… I feel… unstable…

Did he dream that conversation with Hannibal? How did he get here? He'd been smashing open his chimney and then Alana had shown up and something in her face had changed and she'd…

Oh God. He'd *kissed* Alana Bloom. He'd kissed her, when he was supposed to be with Hannibal, when the Alpha was *courting* him, and then… She'd rejected him. Will almost huffs a sobbing laugh, biting his fist to stifle the sound. She'd left him alone, abandoned him in the dark and he'd gone running to Hannibal, to beg his forgiveness and also to tell him…

What? That he was worried about losing his mind?

He flinches when Hannibal stirs behind him. The Alpha tightens his arms around his waist, holding him tight so that he can nuzzle at the crook of his neck, where the soft skin meets the round muscle of his shoulder. Hannibal purrs, soothing him enough that he can relax back against his mate – *future mate* – and curl forwards to bare the nape of his neck.

'Good morning,' Hannibal murmurs, dropping feather light kisses across Will's shoulders. 'How do you feel?'

Will hums a noncommittal answer, twining their fingers together and lifting Hannibal's hands to kiss his knuckles. He pulls the Alpha's hand up into a choke around his throat, whining when Hannibal doesn't squeeze. He rolls back when Hannibal pulls him, shifting his weight and spreading his legs when the other man moves to lie on top of him.

Hannibal pushes down, testing Will's response to the threat against his windpipe, frowning when the Omega purrs his encouragement and draws his knees up further in submission. He shouldn't still be in prodrome; his scent is dull, barely detectable even to his nose, and his pupils are reacting to the changing light, the outer edges dark copper from the drops.

'Will?'

At the worry in Hannibal's voice, Will closes his eyes. He turns his face away, swallowing hard just to feel the resistance against his Alpha's palm. Strokes his hands up and down Hannibal's arms, massaging his biceps until he can loop his arms around the back of Hannibal's neck and pull him down for a long, slow kiss, cradling him between his thighs so that he can feel Hannibal's chest hair against his skin, his length against his, coarse hair rasping together and releasing thick musk into the warm air between them. *Safe together*.

‘Please,’ he mutters, pressing the words into the other man’s lips. ‘I don’t want to *think*.’

Hannibal allows the kiss to deepen, tasting Will’s tongue with his own, sucking it down and then sliding his in and out of the Omega’s willing mouth, an ache catching deep inside and spreading like fire until he’s rocking his hardness against his partner. Will moans his encouragement, digging his fingers into the muscles of Hannibal’s shoulders and pulling him closer, trying to encourage him to push in, to take him, fill him, fuck him, *own him*.

‘Will,’ Hannibal repeats, breaking the kiss before he loses himself to the feelings. To the sweet musk of Will’s desire, and his own heavy arousal. He moves his hand from the Omega’s throat to the side of his jaw, stroking his cheek with his thumb. ‘Tell me how you feel.’

Will frowns at him. His chest tightens, his heart battering against his ribcage. *How does he feel? Crazy? Unstable? Scared?* He huffs a laugh and shakes his head. He feels… like he needs space. Like he needs to go home so he can shower and go to interview the owner of a string instrument shop because he’s probably the killer and Will has to stop him.

‘I have to go,’ he mutters, pushing at Hannibal’s chest to make him move. His gut twists when the Alpha obliges and lifts his body off, leaving him alone. Hannibal’s face is unreadable; closed and fixed in an expression of mild interest and amusement at Will’s sudden need to collect the clothes scattered across the floor. *Fuck you,* Will thinks, ignoring him in favor of yanking on his boxers, only to find that they’re twisted and he has to take them off to try again.

Hannibal lies on Will’s side of the bed, hair mussed and half over his forehead, openly smirking at Will’s despicable attempts to dress himself. He doesn’t need the Omega to tell him how he feels; he knows that Will is worried for his mental health, scared by what it could mean, and embarrassed that he both kissed Alana Bloom *and* then confessed how unstable he feels to Hannibal, even after all they’ve shared. *You still hate the idea of losing control*, Hannibal muses, watching as Will growls at his reflection in the mirror, combing the tangles from his curls.

‘Will, come here,’ he says, sitting up and swinging his bare legs out into the cool air. He perches on the edge of the bed, holding out his hand to entice the Omega closer. Will hesitates, but Hannibal holds his gaze until he obeys and slinks over to him. Hannibal holds each of Will’s hands, twisting their fingers together, grinning when Will sighs at his insistence and stands between his knees.

‘I have to *go*,’ Will grumbles, but he makes no move to pull away. Hannibal dips his head, brushing his lips over the back of Will’s hands, turning them to kiss his palms. ‘Hannibal…’

‘Be careful when you interview this string instrument owner,’ Hannibal murmurs, looking up into his mate’s face, at the clear blue eyes and full lips, soft features framed by a dark beard strengthening the line of his jaw… He frowns at the way his stomach clenches at the idea of Will not returning to him… Why is he even thinking such things? It’s not like him to worry… He calculates, he strategizes, and each risk is balanced against the benefit. Will’s predictable actions are no different; he can survive Tobias, if he handles himself well. If not, well… He swallows. ‘If he *is* involved, he will be dangerous.’

‘I can handle it,’ Will mutters, his heart squeezing an extra beat because Hannibal is trying hard not to show his worry, trying not to be protective, but the crease in his brow betrays him. He leans down and kisses his Alpha’s forehead, breaking free of the gentle grip to stroke Hannibal’s hair and hold his blond head to his chest. He holds him close to his heart, bowing over him to soak up the last of his scent. ‘I’ll come back to you.’

‘I’ll be at my office,’ Hannibal replies, collecting his thoughts and reasserting control over his errant emotions. He sits straighter, his hands firm on Will’s hips. Squared shoulders, jaw up, eyes glinting. There is no doubt who is in control of their relationship. ‘Come see me when you’re finished at the string shop and we can discuss why you feel unstable, and what we can do about it.’

Will huffs a laugh and gives Hannibal a crooked smile. He steps away, scrubbing the back of his head even as he ducks it to bare the side of his throat. Typical Hannibal; just when he thinks he’s softening…

‘Yeah,’ he agrees, watching from the corner of his eye as his Alpha stands, stretches and then heads, naked, towards the bathroom. He pulls his vest on over the thin sweater. ‘I’ll see you later.’

***

He has to wait until lunchtime for a couple of Baltimore PD officers to be available to escort him the string shop. Will leads the way inside, his coat pulled back so that his badge, and his gun, is easily visible. Easily reached.

The bell above the door clangs, announcing their arrival. Will can smell the Alpha’s scent as soon as he enters; smoky and sharp, and he stills when he recognizes it. The opera…

The Alpha emerges from a back room, escorting a young boy out of what is presumably a music lesson. It’s Franklyn’s mate – the tall, dark Alpha with cold, dead eyes…

‘Special Agent Will Graham with the FBI,’ Will says quietly, when the Alpha stops and looks questioningly at them. He inclines his head, just enough to be respectful, not enough that he shows him his neck. The Beta officers mill behind him, casting their eyes over the instruments against the walls. Waiting for orders. From *him*… *If only you knew*...

Will keeps his eyes on the Alpha, his shadow whispering sweet nothings into his ear, darkness coiling between his ribs, pulsing with the beat of his heart.

He’s in the right place.

‘Are you the owner?’ he asks, and the Alpha nods.

‘Yes; Tobias Budge.’ He gestures to the boy. ‘I’m just showing one of my students out; could I have a moment?’

‘Sure,’ Will says, his attempt at a polite smile more of a grimace. He ducks his head, watching Tobias herd the young Beta boy from the shop with a final instruction.

‘Adagio, for Saturday.’ The Alpha turns to face Will and the flanking officers as soon as he’s gone. He stands calmly, his hands in his pockets, looking down his nose at them. ‘What can I help you with?’

Will turns to him, fixing his gaze on Tobias’s shoulder so as not to get lost in his burgundy-ringed eyes. Tobias’s scent is clinging to his skin, sinking into him, warming him until his brain feels thick and heavy.

‘We’re investigating the death of Douglas Wilson,’ he explains. ‘He was –’

‘The trombonist,’ Tobias says, his eyes sparking black fire. Will catches with a frown.

‘That’s right; did you know him?’ he asks carefully. Tobias presses his fingertips together, a smirk toying with his lips.

‘I was aware of him,’ he replies, and then, to offer an explanation, ‘Baltimore is a small town, and the cultural arts community is an even smaller one.’

‘Well, that’s why we’re here, Mr Budge,’ Will says. His skin is starting to prickle with heat; it feels like razors are being dragged back and forth over the nape of his neck, slicing his flesh into ribbons. He needs soothing; he needs touching… His insides clench up and sweat beads across his forehead. Is anyone else warm?

‘I hear someone cut his throat and tried to play it with a bow,’ the Alpha says, hunger making his dark eyes sparkle. Will stares at him from behind his glasses, wishing he had more to protect him than two Beta officers, a gun and his layers of clothing. Too many layers… His shirt is clinging to the base of his spine…

‘Why do you say “try”?’ he asks, and Tobias looks deep into his eyes. Their shadows whisper to each other, slithering out into the dusty air of the shop and coiling around each other. Purring, nipping… kissing…

‘The strings have to be treated,’ the Alpha replies. ‘You can’t just open somebody up and draw a bow across their innards and expect to produce a sound.’

Did you like my gift, little Omega?

Heat rolls through him, settling like an iron on the back of Will’s neck. God… He can’t *think*... Tobias’s musk thickens; he smells like *home*; like autumn leaf fires and whiskey, like resin and blood and *sex*. Will starts to shake, the air shimmering in front of his mouth when he breathes out, and Tobias follows him when he strides further into the shop, his nostrils flaring to savor the sweet musk rising from the Omega. Subtle, *very* subtle, given the heat rising from him, but *there*.

It’s him; Will knows it. Tobias is the killer. He’s the killer, he’s the Alpha, he left him his instrument… His message…

I can provide for you… I will kill for you… I will mate you…

God, he's burning up. Why isn't anyone else? Will's brow beads with sweat and a familiar ache makes slick dampen his ass cheeks.

Alpha…

'The vocal chords were chemically treated, similar to how catgut string is treated.' Will can't stop his voice from wobbling when he speaks. 'We kept those details out of the press.'

Tobias stalks him into the back room. The Beta officers hover behind, waiting for Will's instruction, but Will can't concentrate. He should be more worried than he is; Tobias's body language has changed – he is focused, his sharp eyes calculating, waiting for the chance to strike.

'You're looking for someone who knows how to manufacture gut strings?' the Alpha asks, moving to the side dresser and picking up a roll of gut string.

'Anybody spring to mind?' Will mutters, struggling to see through the gold and black sparks flashing in the air between them. Darkness oozes through his veins, melting into his muscles from the heat pouring through him. *Alpha… I need my Alpha…*

'Mine are imported from Italy,' Tobias replies, handing the spool to Will for him to check. 'Best catgut is. The string section of the Baltimore Metropolitan Orchestra *refuses* to play anything else.'

'More authentic?' Will asks, handing the strings back to Tobias, his skin crawling when the Alpha stares hungrily at him, *into* him, as if he's an offering on display, not a person. No; he doesn't want this; he wants Hannibal. He wants *his* Alpha, not this killer.

'A richer, darker sound,' Tobias purrs. He looks down at the string in his hands, parting his lips to taste Will's sweat on the gut. 'Allows music to say what words can't.'

His eyes flare red and a low growl, too deep for the Betas to hear, rumbles in his chest. It sparks a fire in Will's belly and he clamps his lips shut to silence the whine scratching at his throat.

I have to get out of here…

He can't bond with Tobias… He *can't*… He *won't*…

I don't belong to you…

Tires screech and an animal shrieks in pain. Will snaps his head to the side, his heart thundering in his chest. Oh God… Something's hurt. He has to go; he has to help it. He has to save it.

Tobias frowns at him, worry softening his features at the Omega's distressed whimper.

'Something wrong?' he asks.

‘Didn’t you hear that?’ Will replies, clenching his hands into fists at his sides. He looks at the officers; one of them shrugs, hands loose on his belt.

‘I didn’t hear anything.’

I have to save it… I have to…

‘Excuse me a minute,’ Will gasps, and he bolts for the door, leaving Tobias alone with the Betas.

The animal howls again; maybe it’s a dog? Has a dog been run over? Oh God…

He’s so *hot*… The cold air is refreshing on his damp face and his flushed cheeks. His glasses slide down his sweaty nose when he turns his face. Will pants for breath, trying to think through the fog in his brain.

Where’s the dog? Where *is* it?

A horn beeps. He slows, dodging traffic. He’s in the road… When did that happen? He can’t see anything… People would have stopped, wouldn’t they? There’s nothing here…

He can still hear it… He can still *hear* it… He needs to…

I feel unstable…

Gasping for breath, his bones on fire inside his skin, Will shakes loose a couple of heat suppressants and knocks them back. *A regular dose can trigger feelings like heat prodrome… That’s all this is…* He swallows them dry, forcing them down his parched throat. He doesn’t have *time* for this… He has a killer to catch…

Will ducks his head in apology when he gets back inside the shop, speaking before he’s realized it’s too quiet. He’s fine. He’s *fine*.

‘Sorry about that, I…’ The violence stings his bare skin and he pauses. ‘Officers?’ He unclips his gun, following the resonances hanging, syrupy thick, sweet as rotten fruit, through the shop. ‘Officers?’

Creeping towards the back room, Will kicks the door away from him, raising the gun up in case he has to fire. His stomach tightens when he sees one dead officer, a metal pole through his throat, blood oozing across the floorboards. Fumbles to get his cell phone out even as he dashes across the room to check for a pulse. None.

‘I need ERT at Chordophone Strings, downtown Baltimore. Officer down.’

Where are you, Tobias? Where are you… Alpha?

His shadow roars to the front of his mind, propelling Will to his feet. He’s not frightened, not even angry, really… He’s… *hungry*.

I’m the one hunting you, Tobias… Alphas aren’t the only ones who like to chase…

Stalking downstairs, Will raises his gun high, ready to fire if Tobias attacks. *You killed my officers… I can claim self-defense when I shoot you…*

His shadow tickles the back of his neck, sliding claws up and down his spine until the fine hairs stand to attention on his skin. Will tries to hear past the obscenely loud creaking of the wooden stairs, past the rush of blood in his ears and the rasp of his breath, in and out… He's wound so tight he might snap at any moment…

Revulsion claws at his throat when he sees the jars of pickling intestines, the rows and rows of human guts in various stages of preparation… Does Tobias provide the strings for the Orchestra, too?

A clinking, scratching sound drifts over to him, louder than the trickle of water echoing against damp walls. Will turns, too jumpy for his own good. He can barely see; everything is wavering, closing in…

Alpha…

He's whining. Is he whining? Is that noise real or in his head? It sounds like when he calls for Hannibal, when he needs him inside him…

Slick dribbles down his thighs. His palms are slippery on the handle of his gun. Will wipes his forehead on the sleeve of his coat, trying to *breathe*.

The sound is coming from behind privacy curtains. He doesn't want to see, but he *has* to… Will grabs the nearest curtain, wrenches it to the side and… The second officer, his face sliced apart by razor sharp strings, drowned in gut-treatment water. Bile burns the back of his mouth. Will can't smell anything but the coppery blood and tang of chemicals in the water…

He doesn't hear Tobias behind him until it's too late. Strings whistle through the air and Will only just manages to get his hands, and his gun, up in time to keep from being strangled. The Alpha is behind him, holding tight, the gut slicing through the meat of his flesh, spilling his blood as Tobias wrestles Will's coat away from his neck, away from his *nape*. Fear freezes his insides when he realizes what the Alpha intends to do, and Will can't stop the panicked cry from bubbling up.

No… no, no, no! Hannibal…

He struggles, squirming against the erection digging into his back. Tobias snarls. He's too tall; too strong, and he strikes fast.

Heat blasts away all thought of fight, of distress, of *anything,* as soon as the Alpha's teeth pierce his skin and Will keens, shuddering as white pleasure wracks his body. He drops his head back, grinding his hips back against the Alpha's groin. It's so good… *so good*… He can't help it. Can't stop it. He's coming, he's *coming*…

But Tobias misses his nape. He *misses* the patch of blistering skin where the crest should be. Will can feel his knees buckling, and his weight pulls the Alpha off balance.

Hannibal…

The gun is right by his face, but the muzzle is up… Pointing at Tobias…

Will bares his teeth and squeezes the trigger.

Pain ricochets through him. All he can hear is a whine, endless, deafening. He can't *see* anything… Even his teeth sting.

Oh God… Has he blown out his eardrum? He can't…

Tobias drops him and Will falls. He turns, bringing the gun up, firing off two, three more muffled shots as the Alpha runs, clutching the side of his bleeding head. Will staggers after him but Tobias is too fast.

Black spots swarm his vision. He's falling into the whistling in his ears… The pain in his head reaches a crescendo and Will slides down the wall, but he *has* to keep going. He has to get catch Tobias, because he knows. He *knows* where he's going.

He's going to fight Hannibal for him… He's going to try to *kill* Hannibal…

My Alpha. My mate…

Hannibal…

***

'Nine.'

Hannibal looks down at his lap as Franklyn speaks, giving him a moment to deal with the shock. The chubby Beta holds up both hands, tears welling in his little eyes.

'*Nine* times. I can count on *two* hands the number of times I've been *dumped* by a psychiatrist.'

'I'm sorry, Franklyn, but I think you should see another doctor,' Hannibal says, painting an expression of regret onto his features.

'You're giving me a *referral*?' Franklyn scoffs, and Hannibal nods, unperturbed.

'Yes.'

'*You* were a referral!' Franklyn cries.

'I am also part of the problem,' Hannibal insists, and Franklyn glares off to the side. 'You focus too much on your therapist,' Hannibal continues, meeting his gaze straight on. 'And not enough on your therapy.'

Franklyn shakes his head, huffing his frustration.

'You lost respect for me because I wouldn't report Tobias, didn't you?'

The door opens with a soft click, and Tobias's voice drifts closer, as flat and emotionless as ever.

'Report Tobias for what?'

'*Tobias?*' Franklyn rises from his chair at his mate's arrival, his face creasing with worry when he sees the state of him. Hannibal stands as well, turning to face the rival Alpha, narrowing his eyes when he smells Will's blood on him. It's all he can do to keep from slipping into rut and attacking immediately. He needs to wait; he needs to know what happened to Will.

'I came to say goodbye, Franklyn.' Tobias has his coat over his arm sleeve. His right ear is a tattered shred on the side of his face and his eyes are almost crimson. He stinks of rut; sharp, heavy musk, bitter with pain and fear. He draws closer and Franklyn, predictably, goes to meet him.

'What do you mean, goodbye?' he laughs. He pales when he sees his mate's face. 'Oh my God… oh my *God* is that your *blood*?'

'I just killed two men,' Tobias replies, his voice cold. Ice forms in Hannibal's chest, making it difficult to breathe. Even his heartbeat falters. Two men? 'The police came to question me about the murder,' Tobias adds, and Hannibal's darkness pauses, considering what this means.

Will went to question him. Will is… dead…? He's dead… Will is dead…

My mate is dead.

Franklyn gulps. He doesn't notice the way the air crackles around Hannibal.

'Okay,' the Beta says, holding up his hands to soothe Tobias. 'You have to give yourself up right now.' Hannibal moves to stand behind Franklyn as the Beta starts to approach his mate.

Perhaps Tobias only thinks Will is dead… Perhaps he is just gravely injured…

'This plane is going *down*,' Franklyn continues. 'Let it have a controlled descent. We can get you back up in the air again. There's rehabilitation for everyone.'

Hannibal needs to speak to Tobias alone. He needs to *think*. He needs to *know*.

'Franklyn; I want you to leave now,' he says, but Tobias cuts him off.

'Stay *right* where you are, Franklyn.'

Hannibal looks at Tobias. Looks into his dark, hungry eyes and lets his own shadow whisper its promise of violence.

Did you kill my mate?

‘You’ve done a *horrible* thing,’ Franklyn tries again. ‘And, I *know* that you wish to *God* that you didn’t, but you *did*… And there’s nothing you can do to change that… Only thing you can change is your future. Right?’ He glances back at Hannibal for support.

I’m going to kill you, Hannibal thinks. He offers him nothing, and Franklyn turns back to his mate.

‘Now, you’re probably scared… You probably feel like you’re all alone…’

Tobias snorts and shakes his head.

‘I’m not alone.’

The ice melts a fraction, and then stabs at Hannibal’s stomach. Not alone? Did he… did he *bond* Will?

Did you steal *my mate?*

‘That’s right; you’re not alone,’ Franklyn says, misunderstanding and seeing a window of opportunity where there is none. He looks at Tobias with misty eyes and a wobbling lower lip, his brow shiny with sweat, his scent heavy with salt. He still loves him, no matter how much he fears him. ‘Nothing has happened in our relationship that you and I can’t –’

Hannibal grabs each side of Franklyn’s fat head and twists, snapping his neck. He lets him drop, stepping back as the Beta collapses onto his front.

Hannibal looks at Tobias and quirks an eyebrow.

You took my mate. I took yours.

‘I was looking forward to that,’ Tobias rumbles, baring bloodstained teeth at Hannibal.

‘I saved you the trouble,’ Hannibal replies lightly. How he *despises* the Alpha before him.

Tobias throws his coat to the side, revealing a long, razor-sharp gut string in his hands. The sort of string that carves through flesh like butter, and Hannibal narrows his eyes at it. He is at a disadvantage. Tobias has a weapon; he does not. Yet. However, the other Alpha is smaller and wounded… But Tobias is in full rut; this gives him added strength because of the adrenaline, though he won’t be thinking as clearly…

Hannibal is forced to stop calculating the odds when Tobias begins to whip the string in a figure eight. It whistles through the air and Hannibal backs away a step as the rival Alpha comes closer. He flinches to the side and Tobias strikes. Misses. Hannibal feints to the right. Tobias lunges. Kicks out at him, catching him square in the gut and knocking him back. He comes again. Hannibal jumps behind the gallery ladder and shoves it at Tobias but he dodges in time.

When the gut string wraps around Hannibal’s forearm, it slices through the silk and wool of his suit jacket and his shirt, biting deep into his flesh as it snaps tight. Tobias pulls, snarling and smiling at the thought that he’s caught the other Alpha. The pain is a sharp focal point,

the sort that brings tears to his eyes, but Hannibal allows the string to slice through his flesh and then jumps forwards, trying to headbutt Tobias in the face. Tobias dodges and swings Hannibal around. They stagger and Hannibal smashes Tobias into a side table, shattering glass and raining glittering shards around them. He gathers up his strength and shoves Tobias across his desk – *the same desk where I fucked Will* – and then leaps at him, teeth bared like fangs and nails ready to claw out the Alpha's eyes. He can smell Will's blood on Tobias's breath; he bit him, bonded him, and the only way to break a bond is to kill the claiming Alpha.

You took my mate.

They're on the floor, cartilage crunching and skin splitting as they trade blows. Hannibal matches him strike for strike until Tobias grabs up the dagger letter opener and stabs him in the thigh. He yells and staggers, his knee buckling as the thigh muscle screams agony.

Tobias grabs him up by the throat, pinning him with his back on the desk, the dagger raised over him, ready to strike. To kill. Hannibal looks to the side, his arm shaking as he struggles against Tobias's strength. His scalpel…

He fumbles for it, grabs it up and stabs Tobias in the arm. It's enough to knock the other Alpha back, and Hannibal comes for his throat. Smacks him in the face, shoving him back. Tobias kicks him again and Hannibal staggers, but he keeps his feet under him. He throws a punch, takes a hit. Takes another hit, and a knee to the gut. Tobias is fast and strong.

Their snarls rip the air. They bare their teeth just as ancient Alphas bore their fangs, and then Tobias shoves Hannibal up against the ladder and Hannibal lets blood dribble down his chin, and Tobias, arrogant and unable to think clearly for all the rut hormones pumping through him, punches again.

Hannibal dodges and Tobias's arm catches between the ruts of the ladder. Hannibal grabs his wrist and wrenches it backwards. The crunch of snapping bones is muted under Tobias's scream of agony. He swings for Hannibal again, his right arm useless now. He misses. Swings again. Another miss.

You're mine.

Hannibal stiffens his hand and stabs him in the throat, crushing his windpipe. Tobias staggers and falls to his knees, gagging and coughing.

It's over.

Hannibal has won. He could leave now; call the police and have Tobias arrested. But he *won't*, because Tobias *bonded* Will, and only death can remove the crest that will be scarring the Omega's neck.

Removing his blue handkerchief, Hannibal turns and picks up the stag statue from his side table. It's heavy, and he struggles with it. He stands over his fallen opponent, his eyes blazing crimson as a growl rumbles up his throat.

For Will.

Hannibal lifts the stag high over his head and then, with all his strength, brings it crashing down onto Tobias's head.

The Alpha's skull cracks open, killing him instantly. The light fades from his rut-red eyes and he falls face-first onto the floor, dark blood seeping from the wound to stain the floorboards.

Hannibal drops the statue and the adrenaline abruptly stops. He sways, breathing hard. He's hurt, but he'll live. He needs to be strong now, for Will. Assuming he's alive…

Please let him be alive…

Turning, Hannibal pulls the little side table over. Alpha on Alpha killings during a fight are more or less acceptable, but it will be much easier to explain away Tobias staggering and falling into the table than Hannibal lifting the stag and delivering the final blow. He doesn't have *time* for Jack Crawford and his incessant questions; he needs to find Will, needs to know if he's alive, and, if he is, if the bond with Tobias can be undone.

If… Hannibal sniffs to himself and limps to the harpsichord. *If…*

***

Will's not coming back.

Sitting in his desk chair, watching the coroners zip up Tobias and Franklyn's bodies into black bags, Hannibal resigns himself to the fact that if Tobias *had* bonded Will, he would have returned by now, if for no other reason than to find his Alpha. The mere thought of Will seeking out Tobias makes him queasy, but Hannibal is nothing if not practical.

However, Will has not returned, which means he is dead.

Will is dead. Tobias killed him.

If he says it enough, will it make sense?

Slumped at his desk, Hannibal rubs at his bandaged thigh. He feels… numb. And *tired*. How can he feel both? Emotions stir in the well of his mind, but he doesn't understand them. Long-forgotten memories of a dark childhood, of rooms best left forgotten…

Will is dead…

He looks up when Jack walks into the room, and in that moment, Hannibal *hates* him. *Hates* him for dragging Will into this, for introducing them… For being here when his mate isn't.

And then… A sweet musk, barely detectable over the latex and stench of death in the room. An *achingly* familiar face; soft lips, brown curls… Strong jaw darkened with a beard, slender shoulders… Clear blue eyes passing over and dismissing *everyone* else because they're not *him…*

Hannibal's mind stops. He can't focus. He can't *breathe*.

Will is *here*. Will is… *alive*…

Relief floods him, so sudden and so sweet that it almost hurts. Tears well in his eyes and Hannibal's shoulders slump.

He's alive.

Will's heart can't find its rhythm as he crosses the room. He tries not to rush; he doesn't want to startle anyone, or embarrass Hannibal, but he needs to check him. He needs to touch him, smell him; he needs to make sure he's alright. He leaves Jack's side and circles the desk, but he holds back when he sees how wounded Hannibal is.

This is my fault… I didn't kill Tobias when I had the chance and now you're hurt…

Does Hannibal hate him? He'll understand if he does; Will failed to keep him safe. He failed to be an equal partner in their relationship.

Hannibal stares up at Will, drinking in the sight of him; the disheveled hair and bloodstained shirt, the damp trousers and pale, clammy face, and it's all he can do to keep from grabbing him and pulling him into a kiss, or more…

'I was worried you were dead,' he whispers. It's the best he can manage right now. He can't say more; not with Jack and the FBI in the room with them. Not with Will's all-seeing eyes boring into his endless darkness.

Hannibal's words, his pain and fear, tear at Will, but it doesn't hurt him. Instead, he ducks his head to hide the tug of a smile, his belly clenching and the nape of his neck burning hot at his Alpha's show of affection. *You fought for me… And you won… You have me. All of me.*

Jack's scent slaps at his skin and Will has to fight down a snarl at the interruption.

'Tobias Budge killed two Baltimore police officers,' the Alpha says, addressing Will and Hannibal together from the other side of the desk. '*Nearly* killed an FBI Special Agent and then, after all of that, his first stop is here; at *your* office.'

Hannibal sighs.

'He came to kill my patient,' he says, and Jack frowns over at the body bag with Franklyn inside.

Will picks up the bait; neither of them want Jack knowing the extent of their relationship just yet.

'Your patient; is that who Budge was serenading?' he asks. No need to reveal that Tobias was serenading *Will* as a mating call, and that he came here to challenge a rival Alpha for the right to *bond* him…

‘I don’t know.’ Hannibal frowns, pretending to consider it. Will has to admit; he’s a good liar. ‘Franklyn knew more than he was telling me… He told Mr Budge that he didn’t have to kill anymore. And then…’ The Alpha’s breath falters for a moment; the memory still upsets him. ‘And then he broke Franklyn’s neck and then… he attacked me.’

‘You killed him?’ Jack asks quietly. Sadly.

Hannibal lowers his eyes. Manages a nod. His voice breaks when he answers.

‘Yes.’

Will’s throat tightens around a whine and his voice catches because *all* he wants to do is take Hannibal home and let him rest, but he has to keep up the charade; he has to ask,

‘Could Franklyn have been involved in whatever Budge was doing?’

Hannibal looks down. Will’s never seen him look so defeated; he clearly regrets the loss of his patient to the rival Alpha. *So much responsibility*.

‘I thought this was a simple matter of poor choice of friends,’ the Alpha says quietly.

And a fight to the death over the bonding rights to an Omega, Will thinks bitterly, but he doesn’t let it show on his face.

Jack sighs through his nose and looks up. Shakes his head, frustration rolling from his shoulders.

‘This doesn’t feel simple to me,’ he growls, but there’s nothing else that he can do, nothing else to say, and he walks away.

Will moves closer to Hannibal and perches on the edge of the desk. He takes a deep breath, trying to ignore the itching prickle on the back of his neck where Tobias’s teeth punctured his skin. The cuts on his hands have already been sterilized and bandaged by the ERT, but he couldn’t tell them about his neck without revealing himself as an Omega, and his shirt collar is pulling on the drying blood. He’s ready to go home, but he’s worried about Hannibal. He’s never seen his Alpha so exhausted, and it’s all *his* fault.

‘I feel like I’ve dragged you into my world,’ he says softly, but Hannibal shakes his head.

‘No; I got here on my own.’ He looks up at his mate, at the man he thought he’d lost today, and smiles. ‘But I appreciate the company.’

Will manages a twisted smile back. He holds the gaze for a moment, his chest tightening at the storm of emotions raging behind Hannibal’s dark eyes. *I don’t think I’ll ever understand you*, he thinks, but it doesn’t matter, because what he sees is enough. Hannibal wants him. He’s not going to risk losing him again. He’s going to bond him, and Will is going to let him, because Hannibal *earned* it, even if he didn’t.

‘Let’s go home,’ he says softly, and Hannibal’s breath falters. He pushes himself up from the desk, wincing at the throb in his leg, looking around for Jack. Will closes the distance

between them, dipping his head to bare his throat for his Alpha, and he hears a low growl when Hannibal's clever eyes spot the blood on his shirt. He grabs Hannibal's hand before the other man can expose the wound and presses a lightning fast kiss to his fingertips before releasing him. '*Home*,' he says firmly. 'Then I'm all yours'

Hannibal's eyes flicker red at his words. At what Will means; at what he's offering him.

All yours.

His to bond. His to bite, his to mark, his to own. He nods slowly, carefully, and watches the pulse jump in Will's throat. *Mine*...

He opens his desk drawer and pulls out his car keys, dropping them very deliberately into Will's hand. After all; he's in no fit shape to drive.

'Home.'

***

'How did you kill him?'

Will speaks quietly, sitting Hannibal on the edge of the bed and dropping to his knees before him so that he can unlace and remove his shoes. The Alpha looks down at him, his cheek swollen and red, his hair falling over his forehead, his eyes still bright with pain and something else; something Will can't identify.

'I pushed him into the side table,' Hannibal lies, his mind's eye returning to the moment of pure, transcendent clarity when he decided to smash open Tobias's skull. 'The stag fell on him.'

'*Good*,' Will growls, and Hannibal's smile makes fresh blood ooze down his chin. Will whines at the sight of it and Hannibal moves to wipe it away, but the Omega knocks his hand back and leans up to lick it instead, leaving a coppery smear on the Alpha's skin. They both groan at the taste and feel of Will's tongue on him, and Hannibal slides his fingers through Will's curls, drawing him closer and deepening the kiss.

Fire licks through Will's veins, threatening to send him spinning into darkness, but he holds on to himself, clinging to Hannibal's shoulders to keep from drowning in the heat. He shoves at the Alpha's suit jacket, barely breaking the kiss as he pulls it down Hannibal's arms. He snorts when Hannibal quirks an eyebrow at the way he tosses the expensive clothing onto the floor, tracing his fingertips over Hannibal's beaten face and then tasting the sweat, antiseptic and blood on his skin.

'I want to *see* you, Dr Lecter,' he purrs, rolling his hips down as slick tickles his thighs. He watches the way Hannibal's nostrils flare, catching his scent, and smiles at him. He unbuttons Hannibal's waistcoat and pulls it from him. Rises to his feet in one fluid motion and takes his Alpha's right hand in both of his own, placing it firmly over the bulge in his trousers. 'I want you to see *me*.'

‘I see you,’ Hannibal breathes, utterly captivated by Will’s sharp blue eyes and teasing mouth. He squeezes gently, massaging the hidden erection. Before he can use his left hand to unbuckle Will’s trousers, the Omega is already lifting it, kissing his fingers and licking the bloodied knuckles, sucking up the taste of Tobias’s defeat. Deft fingers undo the cufflink and it clatters to the floor.

Will swaps hands, pushing Hannibal’s left to his hardness so that he can repeat the motion and undo the right cufflink. Then, when he knows he’ll be able to remove Hannibal’s shirt, he allows his Alpha to unbuckle his belt. He fumbles with his own shirt buttons, snapping threads in his hurry, shoving the thick cotton down his sore arms and onto the floor, shivering when he hears the rasp of his zipper being pulled down.

Hannibal’s growl splits the air between them and Will freezes. He looks down, realizing why his Alpha’s eyes are suddenly blazing red. His forearms are crisscrossed with deep cuts from Tobias’s wire; Hannibal couldn’t have known how badly he was injured until he took his clothes off. His purr does little to reassure the Alpha, and he gasps when Hannibal suddenly stands and grabs him up in his arms, swinging him around and pinning him on the bed. The mattress sinks under him and he loses his breath in a keening mewl that only serves to encourage Hannibal to crawl up over him, covering his body with his own. The familiar weight and Hannibal’s rich musk, laced with cedarwood and cloves, sets his skin alight and he doesn’t struggle for long because it’s so *good* to have him close again. Will spreads his legs and bends his knees, holding his Alpha close with his thighs, his hardness crushed beneath Hannibal’s trouser-covered groin. He moans, arching up and holding Hannibal by either side of his face. Tries to kiss him but Hannibal pushes his arms down and drops his head to kiss each wound, reclaiming every *inch* of him from Tobias. Will hisses when Hannibal nips at a barely formed scab, spilling fresh blood across his skin. He’s *so* hard; it *hurts* to be this hard. He needs Hannibal *inside* him, needs his claim *now*.

‘I’m yours,’ he whispers, stroking up and down the soft, shredded fabric of Hannibal’s shirt arms as Hannibal holds himself above him. Their scents join, heavy and sweet, Alpha and Omega, laced with blood. Will’s mouth waters and he scratches Hannibal’s chest when he tears open his shirt, revealing the battered flesh beneath. He pushes up and twists, pinning Hannibal beneath him on the big bed, shoving him so that Hannibal will lie down as he’s told and let Will straddle him. He spreads the fabric from his Alpha’s lean chest, rasping his tongue across the bruised and broken skin over Hannibal’s ribs, rocking his hardness down against Hannibal’s when the Alpha groans at the pleasure-pain of it.

‘*Mine*,’ Will growls, unbuttoning Hannibal’s trousers to get at his length. He wriggles down between Hannibal’s legs, pulling the suit trousers and boxers with him, leaning back despite aching muscles so that Hannibal can bend his knees and help Will get them off. Will shoves his own trousers and boxers down, stroking himself as Hannibal watches, transfixed, lips parted and the tip of his tongue just visible between his teeth. He manages to kick them off and removes their socks, though it’s distinctly *less* graceful than he wants, and Hannibal grins at him. He sits up and pulls Will close, cupping the side of his face to soften the teasing, catching his tongue between his teeth and sucking it down into a deep, hungry kiss that makes them both forget *how* they ended up naked, only that they *are*.

Will doesn't want to break the kiss, but he needs to be on his front for Hannibal to bite him. He cries at the loss of his Alpha's lips, an unconscious little sound that happens before he can stop himself.

'Sorry,' he mutters, bowing his head between his elbows and arching his spine. 'Ignore it.'

'I'm here,' Hannibal murmurs, placing a broad, strong palm over the base of his spine. Will shivers and writhes up into the touch, rolling his shoulders, tensing and flexing as he displays for his Alpha. His bones are on fire; every breath melts the air in front of him and he can feel the darkness pressing in, sparking red and gold in front of his eyes. From very far away, he hears Hannibal's voice.

'You can let go, Will.'

But Will shakes his head; he clenches his hands into fists and presses his sweaty forehead to the covers, baring his neck for Hannibal. He doesn't want to let go; he wants to *be* here, all of him, for when Hannibal takes him. He wants to *feel* it. He wants to *know*.

'Tobias barely missed your nape,' Hannibal says quietly, breaking the moment with his observation. Will looks back over his shoulder, frowning at the pensive expression on the Alpha's face. Hannibal still has one hand on the base of Will's back; the other is hovering near the flushed skin of his neck, just below the bite mark half an inch from Will's nape.

Please…

Will can feel another keening whimper in his throat and, this time, he doesn't even try to stop it. He calls for his Alpha, for his mate, pitching the cry at the right frequency to trigger Hannibal's rut instincts. He trembles with excitement, fire pooling in his belly, his insides clenching and then relaxing, spilling boiling slick down his thighs as Hannibal's eyes flash red and he bares his teeth in a snarl.

'*Hannibal…*'

Hannibal closes his eyes at the *need* in Will's voice. He's so hard it's painful; any little touch could tip him over the edge. He's going to devour Will; going to bite him, fuck him, fill him, *own* him.

'Mine,' he growls, gripping himself tight at the base of his length and lining himself up. Will keens again, dropping his head down and tucking his knees up as he presents himself. As he submits, completely.

Hannibal holds his breath against the mind-numbing pleasure as he breaches the tight ring of muscle, digging his nails into Will's flank to steady himself as he plunges inside the tight, hot vice of his body. *God…* It's *so* good… White explodes behind his eyes and he can't stop himself from thrusting, hard. Will gasps at the suddenness of the movement, at the stretch, but Hannibal is too far gone to take his time with this. He needs Will *now*. *His* Omega. *His* mate.

He reaches down and grabs Will by the shoulders, pulling him up so that his back is to Hannibal's chest. So that his neck is right in front of Hannibal's mouth. Tobias's bite is there, mocking him, an ugly reminder of how close he came to losing Will today.

Never again.

Will tries to move in rhythm with Hannibal, but everything's starting to blur. All he can see is black and gold, all he can feel is Hannibal inside him, Hannibal's arms around him, Hannibal's hot breath on his nape… *Now… Now…*

'*Hannibal…*'

His climax catches him by surprise, and Hannibal comes with a sharp cry as it slams into him, throwing his heart into a dizzying pace. He loses his breath, spilling himself deep inside Will's body. Fights for air and then gives up because it doesn't matter, *it doesn't matter*; all that matters is Will, the feel of Will beneath him, *around* him and Hannibal can tell that his Omega is so close, *so* close…

'Come for me,' he gasps, tears pricking his eyes as the pleasure reaches a new crescendo, his knot swelling to seal his seed deep inside his mate. 'Come for me, Will.'

And then he bites. Sinks his teeth into the tangy, burning hot skin of Will's nape and sucks up the thick, syrupy blood that pours into his mouth.

YES.

Everything in him roars his success; his dark dragon bellows its triumph as he tears into his mate's flesh. He comes again and again, even though he has no seed left to give. He can't stop; Will tastes so good, *so good*, all his, completely... With every thrust of his hips, Hannibal bites harder, deeper, ripping through muscle as his jaw locks.

Mine.

Will can't even scream. Can't breathe. Can't *think*, can't see... He's not here... not anywhere... All he can feel is his Alpha inside him, teeth and knot and seed and spit, joined in blood and flesh. He's *owned*, so completely, so utterly... They're so connected... so together… He doesn't *end* anymore… His body flows straight through to his mate's, into the dark, dangerous waters of Hannibal Lecter.

'I'm yours,' he whispers, wide, sightless eyes slipping closed and spilling tears down his cheeks. He drags in a shaking breath, then another. His heart thunders in his chest. He can feel his pulse *everywhere*, pushing blood from his ripped skin into Hannibal's mouth. 'I'm yours... I'm yours, I'm yours... *Hannibal*...'

He cries when his Alpha's teeth pull out of his skin. It *hurts* so much, but then Hannibal purrs and kisses him, sucks and licks at it as he pushes him to lie down on his front and he's weightless, boneless, drifting in *nothingness* and Hannibal is still inside him, still touching him. Still protecting him. He's not alone; he'll never be alone again.

'Hannibal...'

Panting hard and spraying red across Will's back, Hannibal wraps the trembling man in his arms, ignoring the pain of his mate's body against his injuries. Will shudders, purring and crying at the same time, his body still shaking from the strength of coming so hard, so many times. Hannibal lies behind him and nudges Will's head down so that he can watch the bite mark begin to tighten, the skin on Will's nape pulling in, forming the ridge that is going to be his unique crest.

Hannibal's crest.

'*Hannibal*…'

Will's voice cracks. He sounds so frightened; it hurts Hannibal to hear it. The next few hours are going to be difficult for him; he will need his Alpha inside him as much as possible as their bond develops, and that scares him. His *need* scares him.

'Sssh,' Hannibal breathes. He kisses Will's shoulders, his throat, his cheek. Lets his breath puff over Will's ear, twining their fingers together and placing their joined hands over his mate's chest. Over Will's heart. 'I've got you.'

Will closes his eyes, trying to ignore the gnawing, empty feeling inside his chest, even as he bears down around his Alpha's knot, the sensation making them both groan. He knows Hannibal can't bite him again, not yet, but he needs to be even closer, so he snuggles back against him and bites his knuckles to stifle the pathetic little mewls that want to come out.

'Breathe with me,' Hannibal murmurs, pressing his lips to Will's crest, parting his lips to taste the coppery tang between the developing ridges. The Omega stiffens and whimpers; a mixture of pleasure and pain. 'Stay with me, Will.'

'I'm with you,' Will gasps, focusing on the feel of Hannibal's mouth on him, on the air flowing over his skin. *God*... It's *so*... so right... He's *made* for this... Made for Hannibal... He needs him to say it, one more time. 'Hannibal? *Please*…'

Hannibal closes his eyes at the tug in his chest. He hugs Will tight and sucks an open-mouthed kiss to the side of his throat, holding him by his chin and turning his head so he can lock red eyes with blue. He knows, without words, what Will needs. Sees the Omega's breath falter, sees Will's shadow *beg* just as much as the rest of him, and he smiles.

'*Mine*.'

Trou Normand

Chapter Summary

Jack asks Will to help him investigate a totem pole of human bodies. Will and Hannibal adjust to bonded life, though the discovery of Nicholas Boyle's body reawakens Jack's suspicion of Abigail Hobbs. Hannibal uses Will's declining mental health and approaching heat to continue honing his killer instincts.

Chapter Notes

Hey peeps, oh my goodness this took forever to write! I was also super weak and went back to edit Chapter One... added about, oh, 10,000 words to it, lol... Just a few more details so that it matched the style of the other chapters.

However, at least I've already started Chapter 10... Come on, Will! You can do it!

Mine.

The bond warms his chest, and Hannibal smiles as he watches Will's shaky attempt to leave the bed the next morning. He props himself up on an elbow in the mound of pillows, smirking when his Omega stumbles and catches himself on the bathroom doorway. Will looks good naked, his hips strung with a belt of fingermarks, his back slashed by teeth and nails. He laughs when Will sticks his middle finger up, grinning when the Omega stubbornly kicks the door shut to prove that he *can* be apart from him, despite his biology.

Hannibal lies back, content to wait for his mate's return, and admires one of his own wounds from the other man; a particularly vicious bite that drew blood from his forearm when he used it to gag Will. Hannibal turns his hand from side to side, watching the light from the gap in the curtains change the color of the bruise. It looks good, but not nearly as good as the marks he left on Will.

He can still taste his Omega's blood and slick in his mouth, and Hannibal lifts his fingers to his nose, relishing the tangy musk trapped beneath his nails.

All mine.

Alone in the bathroom, Will has to fight to keep from calling for his Alpha. He braces his back against the door, forcing himself to keep it closed. To keep his distance from Hannibal

for five minutes, at least. He's read about Omega bonding, of course; he *knew* it would be intense, but no amount of research could *ever* have prepared him for it.

I'm not just me, anymore, he thinks, clenching shaking hands into fists at his side. *I'm half of a whole*.

He feels weak. Some of that is tiredness; every time Hannibal tried to pull out of his body, Will had cried for him until Hannibal fucked him again, filling him, knotting him, biting him. Over and over and over, ripping the crest again and again until Will had had to *beg* him to stop because it hurt too much, no matter how much he needed it. And then it hurt all the more because Hannibal *wasn't* biting him, and he couldn't stop shaking unless the Alpha's lips were around the ridges, sucking and licking until he just couldn't come anymore, until his body gave up and he *had* to sleep.

He's lucky it didn't trigger an early heat…

How scarred am I?

He wants to know, but the idea of seeing it, of *knowing*, once and for all, that he's no longer a free man, freezes him in place. Will buys himself as much time as possible, but eventually he has to abandon the toilet and go to the sink to wash his hands. He braces himself, breathes in deep, and slowly lifts his head to his reflection.

He starts when he sees himself; he'd expected to be pale and clammy, ill-looking and fragile. What he sees instead is a picture of vitality; glowing skin, pink cheeks and sparkling blue eyes, the irises edged with copper. He looks *good*.

His arms are still raw from Tobias's attack. Will runs trembling hands up and down the scabs, wondering which ones are going to scar…

But they aren't the marks he really wants to see. He takes another deep breath, his mouth going very dry when he pulls out the three-way mirror and angles it to show the back of his neck.

'Ohhh…'

He can't help the tiny sound he makes. He'd expected something ugly, something swollen and purple, by the way it's throbbing. But his crest is neat. It's attractive. A thin line of scar tissue forming five symmetrical ridges running down the middle of his neck, right at the top of his spine. It's only slightly raised, and, when he reaches over his shoulder, his breath catches as how *soft* it still feels.

The crest flares deep red, burning his fingertip, and Will gasps because it feels *good*. Really good.

There's an answering clench deep inside and he feels slick dampen his ass cheeks. Will watches his reflection as he brings his fingers to his mouth and tastes himself. The crest sweat is sweet and spicy, laced with copper. His scent thickens, rising up as heat rolls through his body. It's changed; he carries Hannibal's musk inside as well as out, now. His Alpha's

sweat and spit is all over him, and Will smiles at the memory of how his nipples came to be ringed with suck bruises.

Yours.

Turning from the sink, he finds his legs more stable as he hurries back to bed. Hannibal looks up from assessing his injuries when he climbs back under the covers, smiling and shaking his head at the way Will presses himself fully up against him. Will can't stop purring as he nuzzles Hannibal's collarbone and stubbled jaw, even if his mate *is* chuckling as he strokes his hands up and down his back, leaving goosebumps in their wake.

'Are you *mocking* me, Dr Lecter?' Will asks, reaching down to cup Hannibal's balls. He squeezes *slightly* harder than is comfortable, and Hannibal gasps another laugh at the warning.

'I wouldn't dare,' he replies, proving his point by holding each side of Will's face and kissing him deeply. He moans into the Omega's mouth, pushing forwards until Will is lying on his back. The smaller man allows him to settle between his legs, one arm still pinned between them, stroking and tugging the Alpha's hardening length, the other sliding through his silky blond hair. Hannibal rocks his hips into the touch, sinking into the taste and feel of Will's mouth, their lips moving and meeting in perfect harmony. They part for air, share a breath, and then kiss again, and Hannibal slides his left hand behind Will's neck to squeeze his crest. Will arches beneath him, breaking the kiss in a hiss of pleasure, his hips jumping up against Hannibal's weight.

'*That*, that, oh, that…' Will forgets to move his hand, forgets to do anything but cling to Hannibal's shoulder as white pleasure crashes through him. It's *so* pure, so clean, so right… He'd been turned on before but *this*…? God… '*Hannibal*...'

He can't *think* through it. Can't breathe through it, and Hannibal is grinning, dark eyes sparkling as he works out *exactly* how to manipulate the crest to hold Will at the tipping point.

'What does that feel like?' he purrs, bracing himself with his right hand so that he can look down into Will's flushed face, at the parted lips, the glassy, sightless eyes, copper rings flaring bright as he finds *just* the right point to flood Will's body with heat hormones. He dips his nose to catch the sweet musk of his mate, rasping his tongue across Will's jaw and then biting into the tender flesh of his throat, right over his windpipe, growling and shaking his head to prove his dominance over the Omega.

Will can't help but whimper, his eyes slipping shut and spilling tears down his cheeks as he rolls his head as far back as Hannibal's hand on his crest will allow. He spreads his legs wide, dropping his hand from Hannibal's hair to the pillow, shuddering from the shockwaves burning him alive, his brain sparking with a thousand gold lights in the dark.

'*Please*,' he whispers, because he *knows* that's what Hannibal wants to hear, and he's *so* close to coming that it's all he can think about. All he cares about. He just wants a release, something to spill the flood gathered up inside him, to let the tightness flow from his abdomen, his balls, *everything*…

But Hannibal just *won't* let him. The Alpha purrs, releasing his throat with a lingering kiss, releasing his neck to grab the hand between them and pin it up next to Will's head. Will stares at him, *begging* him with his eyes, and Hannibal's stomach clenches with excitement at the power he has over the other man.

'Tell me how it feels,' he says. He kneels up, wincing at the flare of pain from his thigh wound, and hooks Will's knees over his elbows. Forces the Omega to curl his body up when he leans over him, nudging and teasing his entrance, humming a low sound of pleasure when hot slick dribbles onto his aching length.

'Hannibal…' Will shakes his head, clenching his hands into fists on the pillow. He can't move them because Hannibal put them there; he's as good as tied, and he turns his face away, feeling himself blush under his Alpha's scrutiny.

Hannibal rocks against him, rewarded with a gasp and shudder from Will, who bucks up in a vain attempt to get him to give in, even though he knows him better than that.

'I can do this all day, Will,' the Alpha says, and Will groans, shaking his head in frustration. Hannibal chuckles, earning himself a snarl from his Omega, and he begins to kiss and suck at Will's inner thighs as punishment, blowing cold air over his twitching, swollen length.

'*Fuck*,' Will gasps, growling at him. He tries to squirm away, to gather his thoughts for a second, but Hannibal is too strong, and he can't do *anything* but submit. If it was anyone else, he'd keep fighting, but he doesn't really *want* to fight Hannibal, and the moment he decides to give in, to do as he's told, he can *sense* Hannibal's amusement, his anticipation of Will's description of the pleasure he's feeling, because Hannibal knows *just* how to push him, how to build the perfect bond; mind *and* body.

Will lets himself sink into the current tugging at him, drifting on the waves lapping at his insides. His jaw loosens and, after releasing a slow, shaking breath, he relaxes his hands to show his surrender.

'It feels *warm*,' he says, locking eyes with his Alpha. 'It feels tight and empty at the same time. Giving in to you feels… *comforting*… I want to lie back, close my eyes and never think again.'

Hannibal tilts his head. He releases Will's left leg so that he can reach over him and hold his crest again, lowering his face to his mate's so that all Will can see is Hannibal, all he can smell is Hannibal; all he *knows* is Hannibal.

'And how does *that* feel?' the Alpha whispers, running his fingertips up and down the ridges of the crest.

Will shudders, sweat beading on his forehead as his pupils blow wide.

'*Good*,' he gasps. '*So* good… *Hannibal*… Alpha- *Fuck*... Hannibal, *please*...'

'Are you going to come for me, Will?' Hannibal murmurs, and Will nods, baring his teeth as his vision explodes with white and his orgasm finally, *finally*, rips him apart. He cries out,

grabbing at Hannibal's shoulders, yanking him down against him as he spills pearly white across both of their stomachs, sticking them together even as Hannibal lines himself up so that he can enter the Omega's pulsing body.

'That's it,' Hannibal whispers, releasing Will's crest to stroke his hair and face as he pushes deep inside him, groaning at the burning hot vice suddenly stroking every inch of his length. His fingers catch the tears falling from Will's eyes and his own breath falters as he loses his rhythm, his balls jumping up, pleasure crackling along his spine and winding as tight as a spring in his chest. He stills, waiting for the climax to wane enough that he can move again, and purrs when Will whines at his restraint.

'I know,' he says, capturing Will's swollen lips in a bruising kiss, releasing his other knee so that Will can wrap both legs around him and hold him tight, freeing him to slam in and out of the silky smooth body around him. He feels his stab wound tear but he barely notices the pain. He's close… any moment now…

Will grabs hold of Hannibal's face, reaching up to kiss him as they match each other move for move. The sound of skin slapping and breath rasping fills his ears. He rolls his hips, squeezing and bearing down as Hannibal begins to come, pulling in as hard as he can so that his body takes the knot as deep as possible. Hannibal grabs him by the back of the neck and they come together, white and gold and red, and Hannibal's arm goes out from under him as his breath leaves him in a sound of pleasure that Will can *feel* is so sharp it's almost pain.

He hugs Hannibal close, *so* full that he can't remember how to *exist* without his Alpha inside him.

'I'm yours,' he breathes, stroking Hannibal's hair as the other man trembles on top of him. He kisses Hannibal's forehead, his temples, any part of his face he can reach until Hannibal lifts his head and meets his lips with his own, soft and lazy and gentle, enjoying the taste of each other as they bask in the afterglow.

'And I'm yours,' Hannibal promises, pressing the words into Will's mouth. 'If you'll have me.'

'I already do,' Will whispers, rubbing the pads of his thumbs over the creases in the corners of Hannibal's eyes.

Hannibal hums, tilting his face into the touch, but he doesn't want to argue semantics. Will has enough of him, for now. Their bond is strong; a good foundation for the work he needs to do on his mate's mind. Will can already sense some of his thoughts and emotions, just as Hannibal can sense some of the Omega's, and that connection will develop over time. Eventually, their shadows will merge, and when *that* happens… He quivers in anticipation, and Will whimpers at the movement of his knot inside him.

'Move with me,' Hannibal says, and he hugs Will close as he kneels up, turning and twisting so that he can sit back against the headboard. It takes a few attempts to shove the pillows up but eventually they settle with Will straddling Hannibal's lap, still sealed together, both breathing hard from the near-cramping pleasure of the adjustments.

‘Just crush me next time,’ Will teases, resting his burning cheek against Hannibal’s shoulder. He snuggles close, making himself as small as possible so that as much of his skin can touch his Alpha’s, his body radiating enough heat that Hannibal can feel sweat trickle down his spine.

They lie quietly for a while, enjoying the feel of each other, wandering hands stroking and rubbing at pulled muscles and bruised skin. Will’s breath deepens as he drifts off, exhausted from last night’s bonding, but Hannibal fights his own heavy eyelids. He wants to stay awake to appreciate his mate’s vulnerability, his trusting and open face, soft in sleep. He strokes Will’s hair and, as he does so, imagines his fingers coming away red with blood. Imagines it sliding down Will’s face, over his cheeks, staining his lips, gathering in the well of his throat and his navel…

I want to show you who I am… I want you to see me. All of me; will you stand by me?

A pair bond is not infallible; Hannibal knows this, and he hugs Will close, resting his chin on top of the Omega’s head so that every breath fills his nose with his sweet, smoky musk. His mate’s loyalty is still divided; he believes that Jack Crawford and the FBI are there for him; that they are his family.

They will turn on you the moment they suspect the truth about you.

Hannibal kisses Will’s temple because their betrayal will hurt him, and he doesn’t *want* to cause his mate that much pain, but it is a necessary part of Will accepting who he really is. Shedding the bonds that cage his darkness, just as a snake must shed its own skin to grow.

‘I will do *anything* to help you,’ Hannibal whispers, pressing his promise into Will’s hair, into his sleeping mind and open heart. ‘*Anything*.’

***

Five days later, Will is on a frozen beach in Grafton, West Virginia, knocking back a couple of aspirin because his head is pounding and Jack Crawford has already been waiting for him to arrive for over an hour.

It’s bitter cold; everyone is wrapped up in layers of coats, gloves, hats and scarves, their breath steaming the air before their faces.

Ice wraps the totem pole corpses in lace, mottling the decaying skin and setting blood like rubies in the sand. It is equally impressive and grotesque; twenty feet of death circled by seven empty graves.

Will sighs when he sees it, his skull lined with razors and his crest stinging because he’s a long way from Hannibal and even though he’ll be going home to him tonight, it still hurts to be apart from him for more than an hour.

Especially when I’m around another Alpha, Will thinks, keeping a distance between him and Jack.

‘World’s sickest jigsaw puzzle,’ Zeller says, lining his camera up to get good shots of each victim.

‘Yeah, but where are the *corners*?’ Price replies, and Zeller wrinkles his nose at him.

‘What?’

Jimmy Price gestures to the totem pole with his notepad and pen.

‘My mom always said, “start a jigsaw with the corners”,’ he replies, and Zeller cranes his neck to look up and down the display again.

‘Er… the *heads* are the corners, I guess?’

‘We got too many corners,’ Beverly says. ‘Seven graves; *way* too many heads.’

Will circles the totem pole from the other side, scanning each piece of the monument as Jack gets him up to speed.

‘The headpiece appears to be the only recent victim,’ the Alpha says. ‘The others are years, even decades, old.’ He gestures with a leather gloved hand to the empty graves around them. ‘And we know that seven of the bodies were buried out here.’

‘Whoever dug them up knew *exactly* where they were buried,’ Will says, his lips twisting in distaste as he looks around the beach.

‘I guess it wasn’t enough for him to kill them once; he had to come back and *defile* his victims,’ Jack growls, but Will shakes his head. He looks up to the top of the totem.

‘These graves weren’t *desecrated* Jack; they were exposed.’

What am I saying with you?

His shadow licks at his ears, his eyes, his tongue, and Will *smells* his scent thicken. Over the last few days, Hannibal has taught him how to recognize when the current rises within him; it’s no surprise that Jack straightens up and claps his hands to get everyone’s attention.

‘OK, everybody, let’s go!’ he booms. ‘Let’s clear the scene!’

Nobody argues; they dip their heads in submission and dutifully tramp to the edges of the beach to await the go ahead to return. Will walks some of the way with them, following the trail of *something* in the air. He stops when it falters, turning back to the beach, to the waves, the current bubbling up inside him.

His crest flares with heat and Will removes his glasses. *I don’t need these to see you*.

The rims of his irises flare bright gold but he is already closing his eyes. Whispers in the dark, a heartbeat…

I can feel you…

Resonances, sickly sweet, rotten… He's falling back, slipping into the stream and then…

He's not *himself*. He's not *there*…

He takes a deep breath, cleansing his lungs, and opens his eyes.

It's dawn. Still dark. The tide is in but it doesn't come this far up the beach. The pole is half formed already; he's been working on this all night and his limbs are aching from lifting and strapping the bodies to the trunk.

Will steps closer to his supplies, his cold voice cutting through to the edges of his mind where part of him is waiting. *Always waiting*.

'I planned this moment, this *monument*, with precision. Collected all my raw materials in advance…' He grabs a torso and heaves it onto the trunk, strapping it down with rope. 'I position the bodies carefully, according *each* its rightful place.'

He's warm now; sweating from the effort of so much heavy lifting. It soaks into his hat, drips down his spine, gathers in the base of his back…

'*Peace* in the pieces disassembled.'

It's true; he *does* feel calm. He's in control here, after all, and his Alpha is waiting for him.

A muffled cry catches his attention. Draws him back to the memory. He looks over at the male Beta, a dumpy, pallid looking man, bound and gagged several feet away.

'My latest victim, I save for last,' he croons, returning to the ropes he weaves and ties around iron pipes and broken bones. 'I want him to watch me work. I want him to *know* my design.'

And then it's time.

Mine…

He draws closer, hunting knife at the ready. The blade winks in the first grey light of day. *Your last*...

He kicks the man onto his back and stands over him. Bitter rage courses through him, giving him the strength he needs to finish it. He bares his teeth at the man, at the *abomination*, and shoves the blade deep into his chest, splitting the bone and piercing his heart.

The dying is slow, and painful, but eventually the light fades from his eyes. Will gets up, looking down at his victory, watching the blood seep into the sand around the cooling corpse.

Now, for the finishing touches.

He breaks the body. Manipulates it. Folds it in half to create the top of the totem pole. Hours and hours of work today; *years* of preparation…

‘This is my resume,’ he purrs, looking up at everything he has created. ‘This is my body of work. *This* is my *legacy*.’

He stares up at the totem, at his success, and his breath ripples the air in front of him. Heat spirals out from his belly, singing in his veins, and slick dribbles down his thighs even as boiling blood drips onto his cheek…

He’s *safe*.

Will blinks once, twice, frowning when he realizes he’s no longer on a frozen beach in West Virginia. He’s…

He looks around; he’s in *Hannibal’s waiting room*…

What the fuck?

How did he get here? What…?

He hears the door open behind him and turns. Hannibal is on his way out of the office, pulling on his coat at the end of the day, but he pulls up short at the sight of him.

‘Will; I wasn’t expecting you.’

Will’s throat catches around a whimper. He can’t catch his breath; he can’t stop shaking. He feels weak; his clothes are sticking to his clammy skin and his ears are ringing. Panic claws at his insides, making his heart throw itself against his ribs.

‘Come in,’ Hannibal says, reaching for his mate’s hand to comfort him as Will stumbles forwards. But Will shrugs him off because he needs to move; he wrenches his hat and gloves off, throws them on the couch and then strides to the other side of the room.

‘I don’t know how I got here,’ he says, his voice catching in something dangerously close to a sob.

Hannibal ignores the tightness in his own chest and merely removes his coat, pitching his voice to be low and comforting as his mate works through his fear.

‘Your car is outside, so we know you drove,’ he says.

‘I… I was on a beach in Grafton, West Virginia, I *blinked* and then… then I was waking up in your waiting room, except I *wasn’t* asleep!’ His throat slams shut and Will claws at his hair, trying to dig out the terror buzzing around his skull.

This can’t be happening… This can’t be happening… Please say this isn’t happening….

‘Grafton, West Virginia, is three and a half hours from here,’ Hannibal muses, folding his coat over the back of his desk chair. ‘You lost time.’

You were in prodrome, Will. If you weren’t on scent suppressants, you most likely would have started a mass rut.

‘There is something *wrong* with me,’ Will whispers, clenching his hands in and out of fists, moving back and forth, back and forth, his eyes darting around the room as if he’s locked in.

Hannibal considers him. Considers the fractures he is creating; widening until Will’s concept of reality snaps.

I will do anything to help you.

‘You’re disassociating, Will,’ he lies. ‘It’s a desperate survival mechanism for a psyche that endures repeated abuse.’ He follows Will as his mate tries to walk away from what he’s saying.

Will throws up a hand to ward off his Alpha’s words.

‘No, no, I’m *not* abused!’ he cries.

‘You have an *empathy* disorder, not a biological one,’ Hannibal insists, stalking after him, crowding him so that Will has no choice but to listen, to *hear* and *accept* what he is telling him. ‘What you feel is overwhelming you.’

‘I know, I know, I know,’ Will mutters, shaking his hands at his sides, his pacing now limited to in front of the couch.

‘Yet you choose to ignore it,’ Hannibal says, playing on Will’s sense of guilt. ‘*That’s* the abuse I’m referring to.’

Will scrubs his face and then glares at Hannibal with red-rimmed eyes.

‘What? Do you want me to *quit*?’

‘Jack Crawford gave you a chance to quit and you didn’t take it,’ Hannibal replies. ‘Why?’

‘Um…’ Will tries to control his breathing but it’s erratic; he feels like he’s drowning, fighting for air that’s too thin to support him. ‘I *save* lives,’ he gasps.

‘And that feels good?’ Hannibal asks, raising an eyebrow at him.

‘Generally speaking; yeah,’ Will replies, trying to walk some feeling back into his numb legs.

‘What about *your* life?’ Hannibal asks, and *that* gets Will’s attention. The Omega turns, frowning at him.

‘Huh?’

Hannibal holds himself very tall and still, lifting his chin so that he’s looking down his nose at the Omega. A dominant stance, radiating power and authority.

‘I’m your mate, Will,’ he says, and he knows he has Will’s undivided attention when he continues, ‘I don’t care about the lives you save. I care about *your* life, and your life is separating from reality.’

The position, the tone, even the flicker of red he allowed in his eyes; they have the desired effect and Will sinks to the couch, dropping his face into his hands in defeat of his mate's argument. He can't fight Hannibal; all he can do is ask for help.

I will do anything for you, Will…

Will tries to control the sickness churning in his gut. Slides his hands across his stubble and stares, sightless, across the room.

'I've been sleepwalking…' He swallows bile. 'I'm experiencing hallucinations… Maybe I should get a brain scan.'

'Will!' Hannibal sharpens his tone and watches his Omega flinch at the reprimand. He moves around his desk, allowing his scent to flow through the air and settle on Will's skin, encouraging him to accept him. '*Stop* looking in the wrong corner for the answer to this.'

Will huffs a sigh and sits back, wiping sweaty palms on the thighs of his jeans. Hannibal comes to a stop close by and looks down at him, withholding physical contact so that Will's fear continues to feed the thoughts he is planting in the Omega's mind.

'You were at the crime scene when you disassociated,' he says. 'Tell me about it.'

Will grimaces but he answers his Alpha without hesitation.

'It was a totem pole of bodies.'

Hannibal considers this, his hands in his pockets to keep himself from hugging his Omega. He adopts an air of relaxed, casual conversation to soothe his mate; Will can *always* find the calm he seeks when he embraces his darkness. When he thinks about killing.

'In some cultures, crimes and guilt are made manifest so that everyone can see them, and see their shame,' he suggests, and Will shakes his head, drawn in so that his shadow can feed him the answers.

'No; this isn't shame, this is *celebration*; he's *marking* his achievements.'

Hannibal sighs, making sure not to look into Will's desperate, pleading gaze.

'And, faced with this killer's achievements, your mind needed to escape and you lost time,' he says sadly. And then he waits, just for a moment, for the inevitable.

For Will's shoulders to sink and for him to nod because Hannibal is his Alpha, his mate, and Will trusts him, completely.

'Yes,' Will whispers, the fine hairs rising on the back of his neck as he *finally* admits it.

Hannibal is quiet for a moment, still turned away, still denying Will comfort. *Flayed alive in order to live*. This is, after all, only the beginning of the descent. It will be worse for Will, yet; Hannibal has to stay strong for him.

‘I’m worried about you, Will,’ he says. Another layer of doubt. Another seed of confusion. ‘You empathize *so* completely with the killers Jack Crawford has your mind wrapped around that you lose yourself to them.’ He looks down at his silent Omega, at the pale and pinched face of his mate, and tilts his head. ‘What if you lose time and hurt yourself? Or someone else?’ He waits for Will to blink and look up at him, waits to see his shadow lurking behind wide, blue eyes, and then puts the last piece in place. ‘I don’t want you to wake up and see a totem of your own making.’

And Will trembles, because he *believes* it’s a possibility. He believes his Alpha, believes that Hannibal would never lie to him in such a way, and Hannibal mourns the fact that he has to do this to help him. That he has planned much worse.

‘Let me take you home,’ he says gently, finally offering Will his hand. Will grabs on tight and holds it to his face for just a moment, tears slipping down his cheeks when he closes his eyes.

‘I’m sorry,’ he whispers, pressing a kiss to Hannibal’s knuckles. ‘I’m *sorry*.’

‘*Never* be sorry, Will,’ Hannibal replies, his heart skipping a beat at the *guilt* in his mate’s voice. Guilt that shouldn’t be there. Fear, certainly, but not guilt.

He pulls the Omega to his feet and wraps him in his arms. Cradles Will’s head to his shoulder, rubbing his nose back and forth over his brown curls, soaking up the smell of salt and death and *Will*; sweet, smoky musk and tangy slick.

Mine.

‘I don’t want to be alone tonight,’ Will mutters. He can’t lift his face to look at Hannibal; he’s not sure he’d survive the rejection if Hannibal wants him to try sleeping by himself again, and he half-sobs with relief when he feels his Alpha nod.

‘Of course,’ Hannibal says, though he makes no move to pull away. ‘I’m here for you, Will.’

‘I know,’ Will sniffs. He forces himself to step away from the taller man, from his warmth and comfort, and scrubs his face again. ‘Can we… I mean… You were on your way out when I got here, right?’

‘We can go now, yes,’ Hannibal replies, and Will manages a tiny, crooked smile of thanks. The Alpha returns to his desk and gathers up his coat, watching carefully as Will picks up his hat and gloves and shoves them into his pockets before waiting by the door. Hannibal goes first, and leads the way outside to the car, even holding open the Bentley door for him, surprised when the Omega doesn’t resist.

He reaches over and places a hand on Will’s knee during the drive out to Wolf Trap; his mate is subdued; his shoulders hunched and head lowered, still except for the occasional tremble. Hannibal can sense enough to know that Will is buried in a sea of doubt and misery, and he chooses a suitably somber lament from the opera *Dido and Aeneas* to fill the silence, leaving Will to his thoughts.

The dogs bound out into the snow to greet them when they arrive, and Hannibal is pleased that Will cheers a little to see them. His Omega drops to his knees on the porch to greet them, one by one, as they return from exploring the yard. Hannibal offers one a pat on the head, but his attention is on his mate, and the dogs quickly lose interest in him, which is perfectly fine by him because he has no particular interest in them, other than their positive impact on Will.

He waits inside, removing his coat and draping it over the back of an armchair, followed by his suit jacket with the cufflinks stored safely in the pockets so that he can roll up his sleeves, ready to cook. Switches the lamps on as he walks towards the kitchen, and Will takes the increasing light as a cue to follow.

'Come on, everybody,' he calls, beckoning the dogs to him and stamping snow from his boots. He closes the door and meanders towards the kitchen, looking up at Hannibal from under his brows as he hovers in the doorway, adorably uncertain even in his own home. Hannibal smiles and reaches for him, drawing him in for a slow kiss as he pushes Will's coat from his shoulders.

'I don't have much food in,' Will apologizes, his stomach twisting with embarrassment at the idea of Hannibal trying to salvage something, anything, from his cupboards. They normally cook at the Alpha's house and bring meals with them to Will's; he has meat for the dogs but his *human* supplies are pitifully limited.

'I have *every* confidence that I will find *something* to use,' Hannibal assures him, and Will sniffs a laugh before resting his forehead against his Alpha's shoulder because he's *very* tired and really, all he wants to do is try to sleep. But he can't; he asked Hannibal to come over, so he should at least *try* to pay attention to him. He jumps when Hannibal cups him under the chin, forcing him to lift his head and look at him.

'Will, we're bonded; this isn't a date,' Hannibal murmurs. 'Sleep if you need to. I can take care of myself.'

Will's heart skips a beat and he has a moment of uncertainty before he feels a warm rush of appreciation for his Alpha for *knowing* what he's feeling.

'Still not used to this emotional connection,' he mutters. He sinks into one of the dining chairs, his elbows on the table, head in his hands. Groans when Hannibal comes up behind him and begins to massage his tight shoulders, dipping forwards and baring his crest for his mate when Hannibal encourages him down. Silence falls between them again, and Will listens to the house breathing around them; the creak of wood shifting, the click of the boiler and the trickle of water in the bathroom…

He realizes his eyes are starting to slip shut and clears his throat.

'Mmm… You're *really* good at that,' he mumbles. 'But you should stop…'

'Why?' Hannibal asks, digging his thumbs into a particularly stubborn knot between Will's shoulder blades and eliciting a wincing groan from the other man. 'You're enjoying yourself, and I want to make you feel good.'

‘I didn’t peg you for being altruistic, Dr Lecter,’ Will teases, and Hannibal leans down so that his breath ghosts over the ridges of Will’s crest, barely an inch from touching. He purrs when Will shudders, the Omega’s scent *suddenly* thickening, and brings his hands closer and closer to Will’s neck, teasing at the *very* edges of the crest…

‘Very observant of you,’ Hannibal murmurs, placing a chaste kiss to the soft skin just beneath Will’s ear. ‘The better you feel, the better you smell and the better you taste,’ he explains. ‘I want to taste you, Will; therefore, I want you to feel good.’

‘Don’t want me *wallowing* in self-pity,’ Will says, and Hannibal hugs him from behind, pressing his cheek against Will’s cheek.

‘I want you to look after yourself,’ he whispers, linking his fingers with Will’s and holding their joined hands over Will’s heart. ‘I want you to see your darkness as a strength; to use it.’ He turns his head and, before Will can argue with him, catches his lips with his own, kissing him again and again until the Omega stops resisting him and simply *sits*, held tight and safe by his Alpha.

I can’t give in to the darkness, Dr Lecter… It’s too dangerous.

Will knows what he wants to say, but he’s drowning in the taste and feel of Hannibal. Heat pools between his legs, crackling up his spine to throb in time with his pulse in his crest. He can’t help but purr as Hannibal nibbles along his jawline, and he tips his head back to bare his throat in surrender as Hannibal wraps one hand around his neck in a choke hold, staring up into burgundy eyes as Hannibal speaks down to him.

‘When we lose everything we care about, we find out who we truly are. Do you know who you are, Will?’

The words cut deep, and Will shivers. He swallows, trying to find his voice, feeling the pressure against Hannibal’s palm. Reaches back up over his head when his Alpha leans down to kiss him again, stroking through Hannibal’s silky hair, making it fall forwards onto his forehead.

You’re going to help me find out, he thinks, his shadow coiling through his ribs to settle, warm and comforting, in his heart. *This is your design.*

Hannibal pulls back from Will’s mouth, testing the heat rippling his breath. He’s close to another prodrome… Will whines, calling him back, and Hannibal purrs to comfort him. He straightens up, placing his hands back onto his mate’s shoulders, manipulating the pressure points around his neck to ensure compliance before he squeezes the crest tight, flooding Will’s body with dopamine.

The Omega falls forwards but Hannibal catches him with an arm around his chest, hugging him back as he continues to manipulate him. He can smell the changes in Will’s scent; the heat hormones sweetening it to the point of syrup. Then, when Will is ready, he leans down to whisper into his ear,

‘You fell asleep as soon as we got home.’

‘I fell asleep?’ Will mumbles, listing to the side in a feeble attempt to be closer to his Alpha. Hannibal nuzzles his cheek and Will purrs, wishing he could move his hands to hold him, to do more than just rest, palms up, on the table, but he can’t, because he’s not in control of his body anymore.

‘Tell me what you remember,’ Hannibal murmurs, pinching the middle ridge and then rubbing up and down the crest as Will shudders. His Omega is sweating now, his skin flushing pink as the copper in his eyes thickens to a band of gold. Hannibal can smell the slick pouring out of him and he licks his lips in anticipation of the taste. ‘Tell me, Will.’

‘I… fell asleep,’ Will manages, his head drooping when Hannibal releases him. He can’t… He’s not even…

Is he *drunk?* Drugged? He whimpers, calling for his Alpha.

‘Hannibal…?’

‘I’m here,’ Hannibal breathes. He pulls Will to his feet and holds him close. ‘I’ve got you.’

‘You’ve got me,’ Will repeats, reaching up to kiss his Alpha, scrabbling to undo his shirt buttons so that Hannibal can get to his body. ‘You’ve got me… I’m yours.’

Hannibal holds each side of Will’s face, kissing him hungrily, and turns his back on his reflection in the window.

This is for Will’s own good. He made him a promise, and he *always* keeps his promises.

I will break you, and I will save you.

***

When Will wakes the next morning, it takes him a while to recognize where he is, because he’s so used to spending the night in Hannibal’s Baltimore house. The muted walls and big windows allowing light to stream into the house and create the illusion of being part of the surrounding countryside; a fishbowl in the wilderness, and he smiles, blue eyes drifting to the dog beds scattered around the floor in front of the stone fireplace, each with a sleeping animal curled up inside…

I’m home.

His smile widens when he feels an arm around his chest and breath on his ear, and Will turns so that he can watch his mate sleep. Hannibal is lying on his side, the covers halfway down his body, one arm supporting the thin pillow under his head. He looks so peaceful, cast in the golden light of early morning sunshine. His sandy hair is a mess, making him look younger despite the grey in it. His shoulders rise and fall slowly with deep breaths, and his scent is a sweet, rich musk, laced with sweat and sex. He looks gentle, vulnerable, and Will's chest tightens around his swelling heart.

I love you.

He must have done something to disturb Hannibal, though, because his Alpha's lips curl into a smile and he opens his eyes, looking right at him. Will can't help but smile back, and he leans in to give Hannibal a long, slow kiss.

'Good morning,' Hannibal murmurs, stroking his jaw. 'How do you feel?'

Will shifts closer, nuzzling his Alpha's collarbone. Hannibal rolls onto his back, pulling Will with him so that the smaller man can lay his head on his chest, a leg draped between Hannibal's, bare flesh warm against the other, leg hairs rasping together, ankles crossed to hold each other close.

Considering the question, Will's sense of peace is shattered and he frowns, chewing his lower lip. How *does* he feel? He fell asleep as soon as they got home last night, and he must have been really out of it afterwards because he can *feel* that they had sex, but it's foggy, like a dream…

'Will?'

Hannibal's prompt makes him sigh, and Will buries his face in his Alpha's chest hair.

'Um… I need to check in with Jack,' he mutters. 'See if he's angry with me for leaving the crime scene the way I did.'

Hannibal twines his left hand with Will's right, brushing his fingers back and forth over Will's knuckles and palm. He doesn't want Will to tell Jack Crawford his concerns; he spent a good part of last night convincing him not to trust the other Alpha, but nerves still crawl in his stomach because he can only influence his Omega to a certain extent.

'What will you say to him?' he asks quietly, eliciting a sigh from the smaller man.

'I don't know… I'll figure something out…' Will mumbles, watching Hannibal play with his fingers. 'Not the truth… Not yet…'

Hannibal hums, bringing Will's hand up to his mouth and kissing it as a reward for accepting the persuasion. He notes the way that Will snuggles closer, seeking comfort from his Alpha because Hannibal has made himself his safe place, and he smiles.

'I love waking up with you,' he murmurs, looking down as Will glances up. He kisses him again, slowly deepening it until Will whimpers and tries to pull him on top of him. Hannibal chuckles but holds himself up, refusing to be manhandled, reminding Will who is the stronger of them, and Will gives up with a huff.

'You should eat before you go,' Hannibal says, dropping a kiss to Will's forehead when his mate whines a complaint. He gets up before Will can argue and walks, naked, towards the kitchen, snapping his fingers for the dogs to follow him so that he can let them out.

Will can't help but gaze after him, chewing his lip with pleasure at how *broad* Hannibal's shoulders are, enjoying the view of his toned back and dimpled ass cheeks. *Mine*, he thinks,

burrowing his face into Hannibal's pillow to savor his scent for a while longer. *And I'm yours.*

He blushes when Hannibal turns in the doorway and catches him staring. *Fucking Alpha senses...*

'Shower, dress and then eat,' Hannibal says, smirking at him. 'You can take your suppressants with breakfast.'

Will sniffs a laugh and looks away, nodding. Forces himself to get up and pads into the bathroom, resting back against the door as he waits for the water to warm up. Heat curls in his chest and he smiles at Hannibal's casual acceptance of his continued use of heat suppressants, even though they're bonded. He's done it; he's found an Alpha willing to trust him with his own body, who doesn't just want him for the children he can bear…

He doesn't *want* to wash Hannibal's seed and scent off him, but he's not ready to tell anyone at work about their relationship yet. His darkness rages at it, hissing its displeasure as Will scrubs himself clean using his scent-deadening shampoo and Beta-pheromone body wash, but it's necessary.

For now.

By the time he emerges from the bathroom, his hair dripping and a small towel low on his hips because he hasn't done the laundry in days, Will can smell bacon and coffee. His stomach rumbles, reminding him that he hasn't eaten since… when? He can't even remember…

I fell asleep...

Will rubs at his cheeks. He and Hannibal had pretty rough sex last night – he has the handprints to prove it – but he doesn't really *remember* it… That's not right, is it…?

I trust Hannibal.

Will cuts off the doubt before it can creep into his mind. He trusts his Alpha. His mate. He's just looking for the wrong things to worry about when he should be focusing on the fact that he lost time, that he *dissociated* at a crime scene. After all, what *would* Hannibal do to him? What *could* he do? He's his Alpha; he protects him.

He knows me better than I know myself.

Will slams the shutters down on his wandering thoughts and hurries to get dressed. Plaid shirt and thick cotton trousers in dark, practical colors, slightly too big for his body to bulk him out.

He looks up from pulling on socks as Hannibal emerges, still naked, carrying two plates of bacon and eggs to the table. His Alpha sets them down and then slides a hand over his hard abdomen, grinning when he sees Will's blush and growing hardness.

‘*Hungry*, Will?' Hannibal teases, feigning innocence with his words. Will pulls a face at him and hurries over, rubbing up against his mate and kissing him, sucking Hannibal’s lower lip into his mouth and nipping it before he lets go. He lets his hands wander down his Alpha’s stomach and over his hips, eager to stroke him, touch him, pull him inside his body, but Hannibal takes him by the wrists and holds him off.

'You’re a tease, Dr Lecter,' Will growls, and Hannibal winks before leaving him and taking his seat by the window.

‘Eat,’ the Alpha says, gesturing to the plate of steaming food. ‘We both have a busy day ahead of us.’

Will huffs but he knows that steely glint in Hannibal’s eye – he won’t get anywhere by flirting, so he sinks into his chair and then notices how *nice* the table looks. Hannibal’s set it with cutlery, cups of coffee and glasses of orange juice, and Will’s belly flutters. Being hosted in the Alpha’s house is one thing, but this level of care in *his* ramshackle little place…

'Thank you,' he mumbles, stabbing at the eggs. 'This is...' His throat tightens and he can't finish, so he just shoves food into his mouth to show his appreciation.

Hannibal reaches over and squeezes his hand, making Will pause and take a shaking breath.

‘I will always take care of you,’ the Alpha murmurs, and he shakes two tablets from the bottle marked “Estrous Blocker” to prove it. Hands them to Will, who knocks them back with a gulp of juice and nods his appreciation before returning to his food.

Hannibal watches as Will takes his scent suppressants, hiding his disappointment at how *bland* his mate will continue to smell. A necessary part of the subterfuge, though, one that will allow Will to keep working for the FBI. And, after his heat, Hannibal can reduce his dose to allow a hint of his natural sweetness to seep through. When they’re not at work, of course, he can refuse to allow Will to wear his Beta spray, and soak up his mate’s sugary musk all he likes.

Will is clearly starving, and he clears his plate long before Hannibal has finished. He’s thrumming with tension, his blue eyes darting to the windows and front door, jumping at every sound. It’s clear that he doesn’t want to go to work, to face the world and the pain within it, but he knows he has to.

So strong…

‘I want you to sleep at my house tonight,’ Hannibal murmurs, setting his knife and fork down on his plate when he’s finished. Will jumps up and collects the dirty crockery, eager to have something to do beyond tapping his cup and bouncing his knee, and Hannibal follows him into the kitchen, standing in the doorway and watching as the Omega tidies up.

A high amount of energy and increased appetite are both good signs that his heat is due shortly; another week, two at most and it will hit.

‘I have an early client last thing this afternoon,’ Hannibal continues. ‘I’ll come by and walk the dogs, feed them… You can drive to mine straight from work.’

Will hums and nods, refusing to look at him. If he does, he’ll never let him go...

He blinks, clenching his back teeth. Whines when Hannibal sets his cup on the side and stands behind him, wrapping him in his arms and pulling him back against his bare chest. Will drops his head forwards, displaying his crest, and shudders when Hannibal drops a feather-light kiss to the burning ridges.

Don't... Please don't leave me…

'I'll drive you to your car,' Hannibal says softly, leaning around to kiss Will's cheek, stroking his jaw, his throat, his shoulders, sliding his hands down Will’s back before pulling away. 'It's okay; just let go.'

Will shivers and nods. He’s hard, his ass cheeks damp with slick and his balls hot and heavy. All he wants to do is tear his clothes off and pull Hannibal inside him, make him fuck him and fill him and bite him…

But his Alpha is walking away, returning to the bed to get dressed, and Will is alone, emptiness *hurting* him as he stares at his shaking hands.

‘Hannibal…?’

Hannibal pauses, halfway through doing up his cufflinks, and smiles.

‘Is something the matter, Will?’ he asks, keeping his voice deliberately light and soothing. He counts to three and then turns, seeing Will near the dresser, blue eyes locked onto him, the edges of his irises burning bright gold. Hannibal tilts his head and holds out his hand, purring when Will all but *throws* himself into his arms, kissing his Alpha’s jaw, his chin, his throat, any part of him that he can reach.

‘*Please*,’ Will whispers, hot, desperate hands scrabbling at Hannibal’s shirt buttons. He growls when Hannibal pushes him off, but he stills when his Alpha holds him by the throat and presses a hand to his forehead, checking his temperature. He quivers, locked in place, muscles still jumping with the need to mate, to be touching Hannibal, and he whimpers softly.

‘Stay,’ Hannibal says, and he steps back, watching as Will follows him with his eyes, tears welling up and rolling down flushed cheeks when Hannibal leaves him to move towards the front door. Will whines, keening for his mate, and Hannibal smiles before dipping his hand into the inside pocket of Will’s coat to withdraw the Iris Inhibitor drops. When he returns, he pulls Will’s hands around his hips to comfort the trembling Omega, and kisses his mate’s forehead as a reward for obeying him. ‘Very good, Will. Now, look up.’

Will tilts his head back and opens his eyes wide, staring at the ceiling. Although he flinches at the drops going in, he doesn’t blink, and Hannibal watches as the gold fades to a dull

copper. He purrs and Will smiles, squeezing Hannibal's hips because he's happy to have pleased his Alpha.

'Come back to me,' Hannibal murmurs, setting the drops aside before wrapping Will in his arms. He hugs him close, burying his nose in Will's Beta-scented curls and concentrating to catch the faintest hint of his Omega musk beneath. 'Come back to me, Will.'

Will blinks and looks around, his shoulders tensing up when he realizes he's no longer sat at the dining table. He holds Hannibal tight, choking down the stupid, *weak* sound of fear he wants to make, and sniffs, rubbing his stinging eyes as he steps back from his Alpha.

'Did… did it happen again?' he mumbles, looking around for a clue as to how long he was disassociating *this* time.

'Only for a moment,' Hannibal lies, reaching down to zip up his trousers. 'You mentioned the case and then you were gone.'

Will sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose. He nods, feeling sick, and ducks his head.

'I might have to tell Jack,' he mutters, and Hannibal pauses midway through buttoning up his waistcoat.

'What effect do you think this knowledge will have on him?' he asks carefully, glancing at Will from the corner of his eye. His Omega hesitates, shifting from foot to foot, tapping his fingers against his thigh. Five beats, a pause… again.

'I… I don't know…' Will shakes his head and rakes his nails through his hair. His temples are *throbbing* with pain. 'I just…' He huffs. 'You're right; maybe I should wait…'

'If your mental health continues to decline, you might have no choice but to tell him,' Hannibal says, stating it in a matter-of-fact way that will make Will trust the argument. 'In the meantime, I want you to focus on taking better care of yourself, Will. As your Alpha, I insist.'

Will snorts and gives him a hard look from under furrowed brows. Hannibal holds the gaze, firm and steady, and the Omega is the first to relent. Will sighs again and picks up his cell phone and ID badge from the side table, striding to the hooks by the door and shrugging into his coat.

'We have to go,' he says, pausing at the door and then frowning. 'Where's my car?'

'Still at my office,' Hannibal replies, knotting his tie as he speaks. 'I'll drive you.'

Will nods, and waits outside with the dogs as Hannibal finishes dressing, before locking them back inside and checking the cash for the dog sitter, following his Alpha to the Bentley.

The drive to the office is quiet. For once, Will appreciates the Bach that plays in the background, filling his awkward silence with haunting notes. Hannibal gives him his space, just like always, and, when they pull into the space beside the scruffy silver car, Will leans over to give him a firm kiss.

'Thank you.' He squeezes Hannibal's hand and brushes his lips one last time over his cheek. 'I'll see you later.'

‘Have a good day, Will,’ Hannibal replies, and Will doesn’t hide the fact that he’s rolling his eyes at how *unlikely* that is to happen.

Watching him drive away, as angrily determined as ever, Hannibal smiles to himself. Will trusts him to go home later, to feed and walk his dogs, to pack a bag of clothes for tomorrow and bring his suppressants with him… To care for him.

And I am caring for you, Hannibal thinks, heading back to his own house to shower and change. *Just not in quite the way you expect*.

***

Will knocks quickly at Jack’s office door before entering, checking that he’s alone. Jack glances up with a ‘hey’ and then returns to the report he’s reading, not bothering to watch as Will approaches.

There’s a degree of sheepishness that he can’t hide, and Will ducks his head, rubbing his tingling fingertips against sweaty palms as he looks down at his boss.

‘Um, I’m sorry about yesterday,’ he says, waiting for Jack’s calm to explode into bellowing rage.

But Jack merely frowns up at him, jotting down a note ahead of his ten o’clock meeting, and replies,

‘Sorry about what?’

Is this a joke? Will hesitates. Tries to find the right way to word it.

‘I… I wasn’t feeling like myself.’

Jack looks bemused, and he stops writing for a moment to offer Will a puzzled smile.

‘Well, not feeling like yourself; that’s kind of what you *do*, isn’t it?’

‘I suppose so…’ Will huffs a laugh, and Jack smiles. Nods. Job done.

‘Yeah, okay then.’

But it’s *not* okay, and Will’s forehead creases with worry.

‘So… I seemed *fine* to you?’

Jack looks up at him and bares his teeth in a half-smile, but there’s a dangerous glint to his eyes.

‘Is there something you wanna tell me?’ he asks softly. A warning. Fear claws at Will’s throat and he quickly shakes his head, lowering his eyes in submission.

‘Er, no, no…’

Jack’s nostrils flare.

‘Well, clearly there’s something that you *don’t* wanna tell me,’ he says, and Will’s heart starts beating very hard and fast behind his ribs at the rasp of a growl in his voice.

‘I… I guess I just got a little lost yesterday, is all,’ he mumbles, but Jack doesn’t seem to buy it. The Alpha clasps his hands before him, dark eyes fixed on Will’s face, burning him with his undivided attention.

‘And where are you today?’ he asks.

Will swallows. Where *is* he today? He shrugs and offers Jack a grimacing smile.

‘It got to me,’ he admits. ‘All those bodies got to me, and… and I thought it was a little more *obvious* than… than it was.’ He sighs. Shakes his head.

You really don’t see me at all, do you, Jack?

Jack considers him for a moment and then sighs heavily. He’s annoyed.

‘If there’s a problem, you need to tell me,’ he says, and his tone rakes across Will’s crest, making him shudder even as he nods to show that he understands. Jack raises his eyebrows. ‘*Is* there a problem, Will?’

What effect do you think telling Jack will have?

Hannibal’s question, innocently curious, echoes in Will’s mind. He can’t tell him; he can’t trust him…

You don’t know me, Jack. You don’t see me the way Hannibal does.

He forces himself to smile, even though he *knows* it looks pained.

‘Everything’s *fine*,’ he lies, and he watches the spark of interest, the glint of *warning*, fade from Jack’s burgundy-ringed eyes.

‘Alright,’ the Alpha says, his tone very final.

Don’t complain again.

He hasn’t *heard* the thought from Jack, but Will can *feel* it. He’s sure of it, and he nods, ducking his head to show that he’s fine, everything’s fine, he’s not causing any more trouble, and then he leaves the office before he can annoy the Alpha again.

He heads down to the forensics department but the smell of death and the razor sharp feel of *pain*, of *suffering*, makes him pause in the lab doorway. Will stops and takes a deep breath, surrounded by decaying corpses and photographs of the totem pole. The air is heavy with residual energy, black and bitter like tar, stinging his skin and burning his lungs. He feels sweat bead on his forehead and his crest prickles.

Hannibal…

Squaring his shoulders, Will grits his teeth and squashes the urge to turn tail and call for his Alpha. Strides up to the autopsy table in the middle of the room, where Katz, Price and Zeller are gathered around the most recent victim.

'How many bodies?'

'We got seventeen in total,' Price replies, and he steps up to the table to pull back the plastic covering. 'Meet our freshest one; Joel Summers. Forty years old, runs a cell phone store in Knoxville, Tennessee.' He grimaces. 'Or *did*. Been missing for three days.'

'Single stab wound to the heart,' Zeller says, gesturing to the discolored chest. 'Other injuries were post-mortem. Broken bones, dislocated hips, shoulders…'

Will nods, listening to his shadow whispering as it rides the current around the room, picking up the thick, rotten smell of *satisfaction*.

'He was special to him somehow,' he says. 'He held a place of honor.'

'Seven bodies from unmarked graves found at the crime scene,' Price says, drawing half his interest again. 'Earth from the body parts matches the grave sites.'

Will nods; that's expected.

'Blunt force trauma, stabbing, strangulation… Wrongful deaths,' Zeller adds.

'There *are* at least eight other bodies that are recent grave robbings from all across West Virginia,' Beverly says. 'No crimes attributed to any of them; accidental deaths.'

The shadow swells, rasping and gurgling… A laugh.

You'll never see me, until I want you to… This is my design…

Will shakes his head.

'They're all murders,' he says, and then he turns and walks away because there's nothing more he can do here. Yet.

***

'Anthony Lamb, 28. Fatal car wreck, 1986. Francesca Bourdain, 42. *Suicide*, pills, 1994. Adrian Packham, 60, *massive* coronary, 2001. Peter McGee, 25, carbon *monoxide* poisoning in his home, 2006. And seven, as-yet-unidentified bodies buried on a beach.'

Will clicks through the slides as he speaks, showing images of the known Totem Pole victims and then the graves from Grafton. Walks around his desk, his voice ringing out in the dark lecture theatre to the faces of the FBI students around him. He comes to a stop in front of the desk and leans back against it, his collar damp with sweat. It's warm in the building today; no doubt the efforts of some overzealous janitor tired of people complaining.

'Every death is different,' he says. 'Made to look like something else. No sadism, no torture… The *method* of these murders was *less* important to the killer than the *simple* fact that these people die.' *Click.* Another slide. The top of the Totem. Will turns to look up at it.

'Joel Summers. Killed with a single stab to the heart.'

Click. The full Totem. He turns back to address the class again.

'Presented with great *ostentation*, atop a display of *all* the previous victims.'

Fervor lights up Will's eyes and he leans forwards. He needs them to *know*. To *understand*.

'This killer's *design* was to remain *unnoticed*. A *ghost*. *That* is what excited him.' He gestures back to the Pole and shrugs. 'Until now.'

His shadow purrs, twining around his legs and sliding up, tickling his back, licking across the tender ridges of his crest until liquid fire pools in his belly.

'Why is he coming out into the light?' Will asks softly, but before anyone can raise their hand to answer, the screen goes black and Alana's voice cuts through the silent hall.

'Will?'

The Beta hesitates in the doorway.

'I don't wanna interrupt if you're rehearsing or…' She looks around the empty classroom, worry clouding her blue eyes.

Will blinks, coming back to himself… Realizes, with a sick feeling, that he's alone…

That he's *hallucinating*… Again…

Fuck.

Panic swarms him. Drowns him. Makes him dizzy. All he wants to do is crawl under his desk and hide until Hannibal come get him, but he can't *do* that… His Alpha told him to be strong, to *accept* the disassociations as his mind's coping mechanisms…

He just needs to take better care of himself…

I'm stronger than this…

Sweat rolls down his neck. Will swallows, gulping air, and beckons Alana closer. *Don't tell her. Don't let her see*.

‘No, no, no, it’s okay, it’s okay,’ he manages, watching as the Beta slowly approaches.

‘Very *moody* in here,’ she says softly, and Will grimaces, offering her a tiny half-shrug.

‘Well, that’s me all over,’ he quips, but his voice is weak and he doesn’t sound remotely convincing. He snorts a bitter laugh and rubs at his clammy forehead. ‘Come on in.’

He pulls his glasses off and realizes his hands are shaking. His stomach clenches up and heat flares in the nape of his neck. *You smell like roses and you taste like caramel… Like someone safe… I’ve wanted you for years…*

He sniffs. It’s *really* warm in here… God, his shirt is clinging to his back and even his *thighs* are sweating.

‘I, er, promise I won’t try to kiss you again,’ he teases, and Alana smiles. It fades when he can’t help but add, ‘Unless you’ve stopped taking your own advice?’

‘A doctor who treats herself has a fool for a patient,’ Alana says. She’s standing a safe distance from him, still nervous, her cheeks flushed pink because Will smells *good*… He’s not wearing his Beta spray and his natural scent is sweet and smoky, laced with vanilla and cedarwood… That’s new, but it suits him. He smells *achingly* delicious.

Will nods, but he doesn’t push it, and Alana ducks her head.

‘I regretted leaving your house the other night,’ she confesses. Will looks down. Frowns.

‘“Regretted?”’ He sets his glasses down on the desk beside him. ‘Implying that you’re no longer regretting… Or are you still in a state of regret?’

‘I’m crisscrossing the state line,’ Alana replies, and Will tilts his head.

‘What side of the line are you on *now*?’ he asks. Alana blushes and chews her lip, but she steps right up to him and replies,

‘I’ve got one foot firmly planted on both sides.’

Heat crackles through him and Will’s crest throbs. His chest tightens and he feels like he’s been punched in the gut.

Hannibal…

He frowns, blinking because his eyes are stinging and he’s not sure why.

‘Are you telling me that to *confuse* me?’ he asks, because it’s not fair… He’s *bonded* now… She left him and he needed someone… Hannibal was there for him… He *loves* him…

‘No,’ Alana says. She shrugs again. ‘I’m telling you that to be honest about how I feel. I don’t wanna mislead you, but I don’t wanna lie to you, either.’

Will nods and swallows. There’s something in her tone, in the *finality* of it…

Do you know…? Has Hannibal told you?

‘I won’t lie if you don’t,’ he says, and he looks up at her from under his eyebrows.

Alana smiles gently.

‘I have feelings for you, Will.’ She watches the emotions warring in his copper-ringed eyes and sighs. ‘But I know you like Hannibal and I won’t do anything to jeopardize that for you, no matter how much a part of me wishes I had stayed that night.’

‘Why? Why didn’t you?’ Will asks, and he can’t keep the hurt out of his voice, even though he tries to hide it with a laugh. ‘And it is *not* because you have a professional curiosity about me.’

‘No,’ Alana agrees. Her smile fades and she looks sad. ‘It’s because I think you’re unstable.’

Her words are like a slap, and Will flinches. Thinks about it but he can’t form words. He can’t even *try* to answer.

‘Hm…’ He nods, chewing his tongue, a muscle jumping in his jaw.

‘And, until that changes,’ Alana continues, stabbing the knife in deeper with every word, ‘I can only be your friend. I think *Hannibal* can only be your friend.’

Yeah? Well, he’d disagree, Will thinks. But he can’t say it; Hannibal hasn’t told her about their relationship, so he grits his teeth and forces himself to nod. He looks away and then back at her, his eyes flashing with anger.

‘Well, thank you for not lying to me,’ he bites.

Alana holds her ground, her blue eyes searching his face, seeing *through* him, *into* him. She knows him almost as well as Hannibal does; she’s been his friend for years. She can see when he’s not doing well. When he’s in pain.

‘Do you *feel* unstable?’ she asks quietly, and it’s too much.

The *kindness* in her voice shatters the illusion of self-control Will has been desperately clinging to. Tears well in his eyes and he feels a lump form in his throat, threatening to dissolve at any moment. Does he feel unstable? The hallucinations, the loss of time, the nightmares...

‘Mm.’ He nods. Doesn’t trust himself to speak. What can he say? What *is* there to say? He’s unstable… *Unstable*…

Alana comes closer and, very carefully, gives him a hug. Will hesitates for a moment, his knuckles white from gripping the edge of the desk, and then he clings tight to her, holding his breath to keep from crying.

‘I’m sorry,’ Alana whispers, and Will sniffs, nodding again.

The Beta rubs between his shoulder blades, careful not to go to close to the nape of his neck. She steps back and reaches down to take his hands between her cool, dry palms, dipping her head to look into his face again.

‘Have you told Hannibal?’

‘Um… Yeah,’ Will says, his voice hoarse, movements jerky as he drops his gaze, avoiding the sympathy in her eyes. ‘Yeah… He knows.’

‘Good,’ Alana replies, and she smiles. ‘That’s *good*, Will. I’m sure he can help you.’

Another nod. Will feels a tear slide down his cheek. He ducks his head so that Alana can’t see him cry and she lets go of him, giving him space. Because she can’t help him. Nobody can.

Nobody but his Alpha.

***

He’s curled between the feathery legs of the raven stag, basking in the sunlight filtering down through the trees. They’re safe here, protected from the world, content to lie forever in a patch of bloodstained grass…

The stag nuzzles his forehead and Will pets it. It nudges him harder, trying to make him move, and Will frowns, pushing it away. He doesn’t want to leave…

The dream dissolves and he realizes he can feel soft lips on his forehead. Will wakes slowly, warm beneath the cover, the silk lining gentle against his tender flesh, wrapped in the smell of his Alpha. It’s the first time in months that he’s not had a nightmare, and he doesn’t want to let go of the peace filling him.

He shifts, burrowing deeper beneath the heavy quilt, hiding his face under the pillow and grumbling when Hannibal pulls it all away from him and exposes him to the cold air. His groping hand meets a warm chest as Hannibal kneels over him, filling his space so that he is the *only* thing Will sees when he opens his eyes, and his Alpha purrs as he smiles down at his Omega.

‘Hello, Will.’

Hannibal drinks in the sight of flushed cheeks, gold-ringed irises and sleep-tousled curls. Will smells of slick and sweet musk, and Hannibal dips his head to nuzzle along a bearded jaw, nibbling and sucking at the sensitive skin just beneath his ear. Will’s breath ghosts over his cheek and then the Omega snakes his arms up and hugs him close.

Will shifts, spreading his legs and holding Hannibal with his knees, rocking up to rub his hardness against the Alpha’s abdomen. The peace of the dream is fading and he needs this; needs *more*.

Alpha…

‘Will,’ Hannibal says, calling him back from the crashing darkness threatening to break him. Will kisses at Hannibal’s face and jaw, moaning when the Alpha holds him by the chin and forces him to stop. ‘*Will*. Come back to me.’

Will blinks, groaning as the heat pulls back from his stomach and settles in his crest.

‘W-wha’…?’ he asks groggily, rubbing his hands up and down Hannibal’s arms, shuddering at the feel of his Alpha on top of him, crushing his throbbing hardness. ‘Why’d you stop?’

‘Abigail has asked to see us,’ Hannibal murmurs, placing a final kiss to Will’s forehead. ‘I received a call from her this morning, while you were sleeping.’

Will sits up immediately, concern furrowing his brow, and he pushes at the covers so that he can jump straight out of bed.

‘What time is it? Is she okay?’ he asks. ‘What’s wrong? Did something happen?’

Hannibal smiles at him, his dark eyes sparkling at Will’s fretting. It’s adorable, and he reaches out to stroke Will’s hair.

‘It’s noon, and she simply asked to see us,’ he replies. ‘Apparently, she has something to tell us.’

Will nods, but he still looks worried. He hesitates, sat up with the covers pooled in his lap, chewing his lower lip. Hannibal stands up and holds out a hand.

‘Would you like to go now?’ he asks, and Will blushes at how obvious he is. Of course, it doesn’t help that Hannibal can sense his emotions, at least the strong ones, and even *he* can smell the fear sharpening his scent, cutting through the musk of his desire.

‘I just want to make sure she’s okay,’ he says, brushing his lips over his Alpha’s knuckles. ‘We’ve not seen her in a while.’

‘Not since we bonded,’ Hannibal agrees, and Will raises his eyebrows when he realizes this is true. Looks up at him and asks,

‘Do you… think we should *tell* her?’

Hannibal considers for a moment, and then releases Will to lead the way into the bathroom.

‘I think she would like to know,’ he says, speaking over his shoulder as his Omega follows him. ‘How would you feel if she did?’

Will shrugs. He fiddles with a towel, waiting for his body to calm down, and avoids looking at Hannibal. How *would* he feel? Abigail is their daughter – not only because they are her legal guardians, but because of what they went through, together – and Will doesn’t think he’s alone in imagining that the Beta will come to live with them soon. But she’s still hurting, and Will doesn’t want to do anything to jeopardize the fragile relationship they have; if she sees herself as an extra to their bonded pair, will she withdraw from them?

Hannibal turns the shower on while he waits for Will to answer. He steps under the spray and then reaches for his mate, pulling him close before shutting the glass door and sealing them in the large cubicle together, letting hot water trickle over their bodies as steam rises around them.

‘I want to tell her,’ Will murmurs, squeezing out a generous helping of body wash and lathering it between his palms. He rubs it into his Alpha’s chest, encouraging him to turn so that he can massage Hannibal’s back. His Alpha groans his appreciation and Will purrs, happy to have pleased his mate. ‘After we find out what she needs to tell us.’

Hannibal nods. He turns and copies Will’s gesture, massaging the tightness from his mate’s body, spreading his hands across Will’s shoulders and kneading them until the Omega groans. Will drops his head back against Hannibal’s chest, fired up and as desperate as ever, a pink blush spreading down from his cheeks to his throat. It’s delicious, and Hannibal pulls Will round to face him, lowering his head so that he can kiss him. It starts soft, lips meeting in unison and parting to share the taste of each other, trading breath as they explore teeth and cheeks and tongues. Hannibal purrs, nudging his hardness against Will's hip, cradling his Omega's face between both hands so that he can deepen the kiss and take control.

Will groans at Hannibal's taste. He reaches up, twisting his fingers in the Alpha's wet, silky hair, holding him closer as he arches his spine, trying to press as much of his body against Hannibal's as he can. Chest hair rasps against his own smooth skin and he shivers at the pleasure of it. Flames lick their way up his spine, burning his crest until it swells, throbbing in time to the beat of his heart.

Alpha…

Hannibal breaks the kiss and picks up the shampoo.

'Allow me?' he asks, and Will nods dumbly. He faces him, holding very still as Hannibal rubs soap into his hair, humming at the simple pleasure of it. At a nudge, he tilts his head back under the spray to rinse away the suds, and Hannibal combs his fingers through Will’s curls, pressing a quick kiss to his wet temple.

'I *do* prefer the scent of this one,' he teases. He lowers his hands to hold onto Will's wet hips as the Omega finishes washing the soap out, his fingers settling into the fading bruises from the last time he gripped him like this.

Will's breath catches at the memory and he tilts his head further back under the spray, closing his eyes tight and baring his throat for his Alpha. Hannibal's gut tightens at the invitation and he leans in to suck at the water running down Will's neck before jerking him around and pushing his back against the tiles.

Will gasps at the sudden cold, but it is swallowed by Hannibal as his Alpha claims his mouth in another hungry kiss. He spreads his legs so that Hannibal can put a knee between his thighs, groaning at the pressure against his hardness.

'Don't open your eyes,' Hannibal whispers, placing a broad palm over the Omega's eyelids to reinforce the command. 'I want you to touch my body, Will.'

A whimper catches in Will's throat and he hurries to obey. Hannibal angles the shower head so that water runs down the fronts and sides of their bodies, adding to the sensations. Will strokes over lean muscles encased in smooth skin, spreading his hands through the soft hair on the Alpha's chest and rolling hard nipples between his fingers. He pushes his head forwards, nuzzling into the wet crook of Hannibal's neck, resting hot lips against the Alpha's pulse and inhaling his scent.

'Hannibal...' His voice is barely a whisper, and he blindly kisses along his Alpha's jaw, feeling the roughness of a night's stubble. 'Mmm...'

He skims his hands lower, sliding one around to cup the mound of Hannibal's backside as the other strokes over his mate's erection. He hears a low purr from Hannibal and smiles into his cheek, tickling his fingertips over the sensitive tip, gathering up slippery pre-cum and using it to ease the stroke down to the base of his length. He repeats the movement, pulling Hannibal closer to encourage his Alpha to rock his hips, moaning when Hannibal grabs his chin and kisses him again, bruisingly hard.

Hannibal devours Will's mouth for a few moments, lazily thrusting into his mate's grip, but he wants more. He reaches down and pushes Will's hands from him, hushing him when his Omega whimpers. Turns the shower off and slides back the door, guiding Will to follow blindly.

'Hannibal... Can I open my eyes, yet?' Will hesitates at the edge of the shower, his brow creasing in and out of a frown. Hannibal runs both hands down his leg, encouraging him to bend his knee, and he wobbles, grabbing onto the Alpha's shoulder as Hannibal pulls his leg out and down onto the floor.

'No,' Hannibal replies, repeating the movement until Will is stood on the mat with him. 'Trust me.'

Will nods, tilting his head to follow Hannibal by sound only. He leans into the hand that Hannibal places in the center of his chest, smiling around a little sound of satisfaction when his Alpha uses a towel to gently dry off his hair. It's intimate; having Hannibal care for him like this, and Will turns immediately when the other man pushes his shoulder.

Hannibal smooths out Will's curls after rubbing away the excess moisture, dropping the towel to the floor and wrapping his arms around the smaller man, pulling him back against his chest. He dips his head and places a kiss next to the burning red crest at the nape of Will's neck, earning a high-pitched whine from the Omega.

Will can't help but grind back against Hannibal's erection, his buttocks and inner thighs coated with slick. Hannibal hushes him and drops another kiss to the other side of his neck, rolling and pinching his nipples until he squirms.

When he looks over Will's shoulder, Hannibal smiles at the sight of his hardness, at the pearly drops leaking from the tip, and he nibbles at the sensitive skin just beneath Will's ear as he runs a hand down Will's quivering belly and then lower to grip him tight.

Will bucks into the firm hold, moaning as pleasure floods his body with heat. Hannibal begins to jerk him off, squeezing and stroking his throbbing length until the ache spills over into waves of pleasure that climb higher and higher. Then, just as he's about to come, the Alpha lets go. Will tries to double over, crying at the sudden loss, but Hannibal's strong arm around his chest holds him back against his body, forcing him to stay upright, shuddering with the desperate need for release.

'Hannibal!'

'Not yet,' his Alpha purrs, and Will quivers. He writhes back against Hannibal's hips, marveling at how *calm* and controlled he is when Will can *feel* his arousal, both from the hardness of his erection and from the waves of emotion crashing into him. But he doesn't want to wait... He *can't*...

'Alpha… *Hannibal*...' he whispers, reaching back to hold Hannibal close, bowing his head to bare his crest for him. *'Please*...'

Hannibal groans at the manipulation, even as his eyes itch red and his hips jump forwards. Will's good; pitching his voice *just right* to snap the last threads of self-control. He growls, pressing an open-mouthed kiss to the scorching ridges, reaching back down and roughly stroking him to completion because his mate *needs* it. He holds him close and Will comes hard, spilling himself over Hannibal's fingers as he bears down against the feeling of Hannibal's erection against his backside. His body opens, spilling tangy, sweet slick over Hannibal's length, and Hannibal shudders with the overwhelming urge to bury himself inside the hot, welcoming body.

'Hannibal...' Will reaches for him again. He needs it... Needs his Alpha inside him... His eyes fly open as Hannibal grabs him in a choke, hauling his back flush to the Alpha's chest. Pressure builds at his entrance and then Hannibal is pushing inside him, inch by inch, moving in time with Will's pulsing, clenching muscles. He groans at the stretch, at the pleasurable ache as Hannibal fills him. Owns him. He lifts an arm up over his head to hold Hannibal's hair, stroking him as though soothing him.

Hannibal holds Will tight, one hand at his throat and the other over his stomach, purring when he feels his own length moving inside Will's body. He pushes Will to his knees and follows him, fucking him hard and fast, panting into Will's ear before he fixes his lips around the irresistibly soft crest at the top of the Omega's spine. He sucks hungrily and white pleasure crashes through him as Will comes again, spasming around him and squeezing like a vice, milking his release from him in three final, jerky thrusts before he swells to a knot, locking them together.

'Fuck... Will...' He releases Will's burning neck to rest his forehead on the other man's shoulder. Sits back on his heels and pulls Will to him, wrapping his arms tight around him. *'Mmm*...'

Will gives a breathless chuckle, linking their fingers together over his racing heart. He turns just enough that he can kiss Hannibal and then drops his head back, gazing, glassy-eyed, at the bathroom ceiling.

‘I *needed* that,' he murmured. He tries to adjust his weight on aching knees, his legs still spread around Hannibal, and hisses a laugh when Hannibal's knot pulls at his insides. 'Um... well, this is *awkward*.'

'Perhaps something to consider for next time,' Hannibal chuckles, grinning at him and kissing his cheek when Will laughs. 'We shall have to be patient.'

Will groans, but he makes no further attempts to move, just holds Hannibal's arms close to his heart, content to trace the Alpha's knuckles with his fingertips. After a few minutes of silence, he feels Hannibal’s wandering lips trace over the jagged line of scar tissue beneath the ridges of his crest, and he hums.

‘I never did tell you how I got that, did I?’

‘No,’ Hannibal murmurs, kissing it again, feeling Will tremble beneath his mouth whenever he draws closer to the crest. ‘Are you ready now?’

Will sniffs.

‘I was ready before you bonded me,’ he says. ‘I just... got distracted.'

Hannibal hums, nuzzling his cheek, and Will sighs, rubbing his cheek back and forth over the back of his Alpha’s hands.

‘I did it to myself... After the attack.'

His heart skips a beat at the memory of it; the smell of sour breath and oil. He pushes through the instinctive panic, grounding himself in Hannibal’s musk and the warmth of his body against his back, of his knot inside him, pulsing in time to their heartbeats. And Hannibal lets him, holding very still and not responding to the change in his scent; the sharp, salty tang of fear and the rasping of his breath as he continues,

‘Nothing *happened*… Coby was arrested and I was safe.' Will shakes his head. ‘But it meant that everyone at the station found out what I was, and…’ His hands tighten around Hannibal's as he remembers the comments, the groping hands... Hot breath on the back of his neck as he was shoved up against a locker at the end of a long day...

He shrugs, trying to keep his voice light.

‘It… caused some problems. A few of them wanted to bond me…’ He swallows and rolls his head to kiss Hannibal’s neck. ‘They were very insistent and… I just wanted it to stop.’

Hannibal swallows, counting to five to control his breathing before he speaks so that his voice is even.

'You thought that if you mutilated yourself, you would be unappealing to an Alpha. Or, they would assume the scar was a crest and that you were already bonded.'

Will rolls his eyes and snorts.

‘Yeah… Only it didn’t work, because *crests* are the only scars that *can* happen there. The skin around it… Well, you can see, but *that* part of my neck? it healed like it had never happened.'

Hannibal holds very still, his heart beating very hard in his chest. He has the strangest sensation in his stomach, and he rests his cheek against Will's head, closing his eyes and biting his lip as his knot starts to go down.

‘Thank you for telling me,’ he says quietly, and Will hums, turning as soon as he’s free and leaning in to give Hannibal a gentle kiss.

‘You owe me a secret now, Dr Lecter,’ the Omega murmurs, but Hannibal can’t bring himself to smile at the attempted jest. He just nods, staring deep into Will’s blue eyes, and then cups his face to stroke his cheek.

Will shifts, his throat swelling around a lump at the expression on Hannibal’s face. He pulls away, softening the withdrawal with a final kiss to his Alpha’s palm, and then clears his throat.

‘We should get going,’ he says hoarsely, and Hannibal nods. They both stagger to their feet and wrap towels around their waist, and Hannibal follows Will back into the bedroom, watching from the corner of his eye as his Omega dresses in the dark trousers and ugly checked shirt he’s brought with him in his weekend bag. A dark inferno rages in the pit of his stomach and, when he thinks of Will’s younger self, of the betrayal by the people around him, and the way that history will, inevitably, repeat itself as his Omega becomes stronger, his chest aches.

I'm going to find them, Will. Whoever hurt you... We’ll kill them together.

***

Two hours later, Will is standing by the balcony windows of Abigail’s room at the Porthaven Psychiatric Hospital, his jacket draped over his arm and shirt sleeves rolled up because it’s *warm* in here, his heart pounding and mind whirring with disbelief at his surrogate daughter’s announcement that she’s going to work with *Freddie* Lounds to tell her story.

‘I’m trying to be… *understated* when I say that this is a *bad* idea,’ he says, removing his glasses so that he can rub his eyes. For all his calm after his shower with Hannibal, his head is now aching with a headache and his shoulders feel like granite.

He can *feel* his Abigail’s resentment, but he takes comfort in Hannibal’s icy anger. It is restrained under layers and layers of good manners, but knowing that his Alpha is just as against this plan as he is soothes the sting of Abigail’s emotions.

Hannibal hides it well enough; he is perusing Abigail’s belongings on the desk next to him, buying himself time to school his expression into neutrality, but Will can smell the sharp, smoky tang of rage in his scent, and, when he speaks, his voice is deceptively light.

‘Freddie Lounds is dangerous.’

‘She said she wanted me to write about you guys in the book,’ Abigail says, nerves and defiance warring in her voice, making it tremble.

Will and Hannibal exchange a look and the Omega hangs his glasses from the front of his shirt. He shrugs, asking for help, and Hannibal finally turns to Abigail.

‘You would be forfeiting your privacy, and ours,’ he says, staring down at her with inscrutable dark eyes, disapproval radiating from him.

Seeing the wobble in Abigail’s lower lip, Will tries again.

‘This… this… Well, *all* of this will change,’ he says, gesturing to the room, the Scrabble board on the table, Abigail. ‘Whatever you’re feeling now, that *won’t* last. Things *change*.’ Abigail looks down at her crossed arms, chewing her lip at Will’s words. Sensing an opening, Will steps closer and continues gently, ‘Things are changing for me, too… I’ve been doing some accounting in my life of what’s *important* and what *isn’t*.’

Hannibal watches him, his hands clasped before him, coat hanging over his arm as he waits to see what his mate will say next. If he’ll *admit* how much he cares for the daughter that Hannibal has given him.

‘*You* are important, Abigail,’ Will says, but the teenager just rolls her eyes at him and, when she speaks, her tone is like acid.

‘Just because you *killed* my dad doesn’t mean you get to *be* him.’

Her words slice at Will and he flinches, looking away to hide the tears brightening his eyes. Two spots of color flare on his cheeks and Hannibal barely suppresses a growl at her callousness.

‘Abigail,’ he warns, drawing her immediate attention, and he steps up to stand beside Will, providing a unified front and offering the comfort of his warmth, his scent, as Will tries to get his breathing back under control. ‘You’ve been through a traumatic event,’ the Alpha continues. ‘And no one more traumatized than you, Abigail, but we went through it *together*. What you write, you write about *all* of us.’

‘I don’t need your *permission*,’ Abigail snaps, and Hannibal inclines his head, his obsidian eyes never leaving Abigail’s face.

‘And you don’t need our approval,’ he replies. ‘But I hope it would mean something.’

Do not test me.

Abigail falters, tears welling in her blue eyes when she looks to Will again.

‘I know what people think I did,’ she whispers. ‘They’re *wrong*. *Why* can’t I tell everybody that they’re wrong?’

‘You have *nothing* to apologize for,’ Will says, gripping the back of the chair to brace himself against Abigail’s pain. All he wants to do is pull her into his arms and hold her, protect her

from the world, but he can't; she needs to fight this herself.

Just like me.

'Yet,' Hannibal warns, allowing some of his dark anger to sharpen his voice. 'But if you open this door, Abigail, you won't control what comes through.'

The body of Nicholas Boyle hangs in the air between them, hidden from Will; their little secret…

Hannibal's darkness whispers to Abigail's shadow and he quirks an eyebrow; one final warning to behave. To protect her family.

'Are you ready for that?'

Abigail opens her mouth, but she doesn't know what to say, so she just ducks her head again. Twists her hands together and sighs. Will frowns and transfers his coat to the chair, dropping to a crouch before her and hesitantly taking one of her hands in both of his hand. Abigail looks down at him, her chin wobbling, and Will swallows. He hates to see her so upset, so lost, but this isn't the solution. Maybe, if he can get her to *wait*, she'll realize that on her own.

'Just… Promise me you'll think about it,' he says softly. 'Take a few days… You don't have to make a decision right away.'

Abigail glances at Hannibal, at his cold, unwavering gaze, and then nods at Will. She ducks her head, taking the sympathy that the Omega offers her, letting her hair fall forwards so that Will reaches up to push it back from her face, stroking her cheek as he does. Hannibal's lips curve into a smile at his daughter's manipulation, but his eyes are still narrowed at her recklessness.

I want you to be our daughter, Abigail, but I will not allow anything to threaten Will.

'Hannibal and I have something to tell you as well,' Will murmurs, and Abigail paints a quizzical look on her face. Will huffs a small smile and stands up, drawing the Beta with him before turning and pulling the collar of his shirt down from the crest on his neck.

'*Oh…'* Abigail pauses for just long enough that panic claws at Will's throat and his mouth tastes bitter with regret. He turns back to her, but she manages a smile, even if her eyes are clouded with sadness. 'I'm really glad for you,' Abigail says, and she allows Will to hug her when he opens his arms in offering.

Hannibal approaches from the other side and Abigail raises an eyebrow at him. He smiles and places a hand in the middle of her back, the other on Will's, a family together.

Born in blood.

Abigail sighs and ducks her head when Will lets her go.

'I remember when my parents mated,' she says, prompting Will's hand to twitch as if he wants to reach for her but isn't sure he's allowed. Hannibal stays quiet, his hand still stroking

between his mate's shoulder blades, watching as Abigail hesitates and then reaches up to brush a curl of hair from Will's forehead. 'Are you happy?'

'Mm.' Will nods, managing a twisted smile. The Beta tilts her head, sharp eyes picking out the shadows under his eyes and the tension in his jaw. She doesn't challenge his lie, though; just sits back down and picks up the bag of Scrabble tiles, giving it a pointed shake.

'So. Are we going to play?'

***

Struggling to concentrate on the Totem Pole case, Will forces his wandering thoughts back to the diagram of victims on the wall in front of him. He crosses his arms, hugging his elbows, his skin stinging and head throbbing; he just wants to be at home, but he *can't*, he has to be here, away from his Alpha…

'The display was built in Grafton for a reason,' he says, keeping his back to Beverly, Jimmy and Brian. 'Totem poles commemorate special events. They tell the story of a life. If Joel Summers is his finale, then this lowest body on the pole –' Will points to the picture. '– will be our killer's beginning. His first.'

'Fletcher Marshall,' Beverly says. 'Murdered in 1973. Beaten to death right in Grafton. His grave was robbed five days ago.'

'No-one convicted of killing him?' Will asks, frowning at the photograph of Marshall.

'Not *yet*,' Price says.

'So our guy got away with it forty years ago,' Will mutters, and Zeller shakes his head in disgust.

'So he kept on going…'

I don't have time for this; I should be with my family…

'There will be a *connection* between Joel Summers and Fletcher Marshall,' Will says, stabbing from the top of the totem to the bottom, but before he can add anything further, Jack's scent interrupts them and they all turn to see him in the doorway.

'Will; I need you in my office.'

Will's stomach drops and sweat dribbles down his back. Does he know about Hannibal? Has Alana told him? Has she told him about her concerns? That's he's *unstable?*

He glances at the others but they only shrug; they have no idea what Jack wants with him, and the Alpha is already turning away, assuming he'll follow.

Fucking Alphas…

Will bites back a growl and trails after him, an obedient little puppy. Jack doesn't say anything, just picks up his phone and calls someone. Will leans back against the meeting table, keeping a space between them so that Jack's scent doesn't get too close to him.

A few minutes later, he's surprised when Alana and Hannibal walk in; the Beta carefully avoids Will's eyes after an initial glance, but Will hardly notices in favor of breathing in his Alpha's heavy musk and cedarwood cologne.

The sight and smell of his mate is like a drop of liquid fire down his spine, and Will feels tendons grind as his shoulders relax. Hannibal is careful not to look at him for more than a moment; he fixes Jack with a politely curious look, and Will manages to stay where he is, allowing Alana to stand in the middle.

Jack hangs up as Alana and Hannibal enter the room, and he's speaking before the door has closed behind them.

'Nicholas Boyle turned up in Minnesota. Dead.'

Hannibal tilts his head, considering Jack carefully as the other Alpha continues,

'His body was found in the woods. He was frozen. They thawed him out fairly quickly, but they said they can't tell if he died a week ago, six weeks ago, or the night that he disappeared.'

'How did he die?' Alana asks, and Jack sighs, gripping the back of his chair tight enough to make the leather creak.

'Knife wound; he was gutted.'

You butchered him, Abigail… Hannibal's mind returns to that night, to the attack, to the Beta's shock and disgust at her own excitement of the kill. His heart is beating very fast and unease coils like an adder in his stomach. He resents such a feeling.

What have you done?

'I've had the body flown down here,' Jack continues. 'I want Abigail Hobbs to identify it for us.'

Hannibal frowns, masking his worry as puzzlement.

'You already have a positive ID,' he says, but Jack raises an eyebrow.

'Not from Abigail Hobbs.'

'You *can't* put her in a room with Nick Boyle's body!' Alana protests. 'She *already* has nightmares about him, Jack!'

Jack nods, but there's a hungry glint to his eyes and his jaw is set.

'I'm curious about *why*.'

Will looks over at him, hugging his elbows across his chest and frowning in disbelief.

‘You *can't* think that she has something to *do* with this?’

‘I think Abigail Hobbs is the common denominator between her father, Marissa Schuur, and Nicholas Boyle,’ Jack says, raising his voice when Will shifts and shakes his head. ‘They all go back to Abigail! My instincts tell me that *Abigail* has answers that we have not heard!’

Will glares at him, his eyes prickling with the urge to flash gold despite the Inhibitor drops.

‘What are the *questions*, Jack?’ he demands, and the Alpha huffs.

‘Let's start with where she goes when she climbs the walls of the psychiatric facility,’ he says. ‘Maybe she's meeting Nicholas Boyle. None of us know what was really going on between them.’

‘I want to go on record as saying that this is a very *bad* idea,’ Alana says, looking over to her mentor for help. ‘Hannibal?’

You selfish, reckless child, Hannibal thinks, fury making his eyes itch to glow red. However, he merely glances from her to the other Alpha, and says lightly,

‘Jack has the look of a man with no interest in any opinion but his own.’

‘I want you to observe on this, Alana,’ Jack says, ignoring Hannibal’s comment. Will growls and straightens up, his nurturing instincts kicking in to defend his adopted daughter. If he weren’t angry with Abigail, Hannibal would want to purr at Will’s fierceness.

‘If you're putting Abigail in a room with the body, *I* want to be there,’ Will demands, but Jack’s gaze is steely when he meets his eye.

‘I'm sorry, Will,’ he says, ‘I am not *confident* with your ability to be *objective* about Abigail Hobbs right now.’ He strides to the door and holds it open. ‘Alana.’

The Beta sighs, but she’s been given an instruction and she grits her teeth as she follows him out to meet Abigail in reception.

In the proceeding silence, Hannibal steps forward and releases a quiet sigh. He avoids Will’s eye because his own gaze is distant; he is considering the possibilities before him, weighing the risks and anticipating the outcomes.

You’ve put us all at risk, Abigail… I warned you…

The Omega rakes shaking hands through his hair at Jack’s pigheaded recklessness, and his voice trembles with anger and frustration when he speaks.

‘He could do Abigail *irreparable* damage exposing her to this!’

Hannibal, however, remains calm, and murmurs,

‘Perhaps she's stronger than we think.’

For her sake, I hope she is.

Will huffs and shakes his head.

‘She shouldn’t *have* to be strong,’ he growls, pacing closer to his Alpha. ‘Jack’s wrong about her. He’s wrong.’

No, he’s not, Hannibal thinks, but he simply turns and, after checking that the corridor outside is empty, links his fingers with his Omega.

Will whines softly and leans against Hannibal, dipping his head and resting his forehead against his Alpha’s shoulder, soaking up his scent, trying to absorb as much of it as possible to keep him going until this evening.

‘Did you drive her here?’ he asks, speaking into Hannibal’s suit. His Alpha wraps an arm around him, resting his cheek on the top of Will’s head, and nods so that Will can feel it.

‘Yes.’

‘Make sure she’s alright?’ Will asks, glancing up at him. ‘When you take her back? Will you stay with her?’

Hannibal nods, and then checks the corridor again before risking a kiss, brushing their lips together until Will moans and leans forward to deepen it. Hannibal groans but pushes him back before they lose themselves in the taste of each other, and Will scrubs the back of his head, shoving his hands into his pockets to keep from grabbing for his mate again.

‘I… should go,’ he mutters. ‘Have to get back to the case.’

Hannibal doesn’t say anything, just eyes him hungrily as Will stares at him, each of them drinking in the fine details of their mate’s face. A minute passes and then Hannibal wets his lips, his eyes glinting at the way Will’s breath catches.

‘I’ll see you at home, Will,’ Hannibal murmurs, and Will quivers as a blush warms his face. He turns away, hiding his smile, and nods.

‘See you at home.’

***

The drive back to Porthaven Psychiatric Hospital is quiet, and Hannibal waits until they are alone in Abigail’s room before he attempts to discuss his anger with his daughter. He imagines running his tongue over razor fangs like the Alphas of old, tasting blood, and doesn’t turn to look at her when he speaks.

‘It can be a comfort to see the broken, bloated corpse of a monster, and know it can never come back.’

He has his back to Abigail, staring with unseeing eyes at the frosted glass of the big windows, his coat over one arm, the other hand in his pocket but shoulders locked with tension and eyes itching to glow red. He has no intention of hiding the true extent of his disappointment from Abigail. After all, she has poked the proverbial bear; she deserves to know the truth.

Waiting by her bed, her shoulders hunched under the fury of the Alpha before her, Abigail blinks tears from her eyes.

'Nick Boyle wasn't a monster.'

Hannibal turns to face her, his eyes cold, and quirks an eyebrow.

'Were *you?*'

The Beta trembles, but she takes a step closer, hands clasped before her, fingers picking at the cuffs of her sweater.

'I sometimes feel like one.'

Hannibal tilts his head, still distant, his expression unreadable.

'Is that why you uncovered his body?' he asks, and Abigail falters. She looks away and opens her mouth, but she can't think of a reply.

Hannibal sighs, and turns from the window.

'Would this be a chapter in your book, Abigail?' he asks, his casual words slicing at her. Abigail ducks her head, taking a shaky breath, and then glares at him, hugging her elbows.

'*No*. Neither would me killing Nick, or *you* helping me hide the body.'

Hannibal's lips curl into a smile at the threat, and he glances at her.

'There's *always* an addendum,' he replies, and Abigail lifts her chin.

'FBI already asked their questions; I answered them. I *passed*.'

'*With* Jack Crawford's attention,' Hannibal reminds her, pacing towards the window again. Abigail huffs in frustration.

'You're *right*; I opened the door! I can't control what comes through it, but *this* time, I could control *when*.' Her eyes light up and she continues, 'I'm not afraid of them finding Nicholas Boyle anymore; he's been found.'

Hannibal doesn't look at her, his face half in shadow, framed by the grey light of the window behind him.

'You betrayed my trust,' he says quietly. 'You jeopardized my life, as well as your own. I deserve more than that.'

Abigail looks away, struggling to find a way to argue with him, but Hannibal closes the distance between them before she can speak.

‘I need to trust you, Abigail.’ For all his gentle tone, the warning in his voice is clear, and Abigail looks up at him. Hannibal raises his eyebrows and allows his eyes to flicker red. ‘What if I can’t?’

***

‘Joel Summers, the headpiece of our totem pole, was adopted after his parents died.’

Beverly speaks as Jimmy Price pulls the plastic sheet down from Joel’s broken, bruised body, and they all look down at him. Will’s dark shadow is still growling at Jack’s treatment of Abigail, and he crosses his arms, doing nothing to hide the radiating resentment towards the Alpha stood beside him.

After settling Abigail back into her room at Porthaven, Hannibal had gone home and prepared a chicken liver parfait, sous vide suckling pig with spiced port jus and a balsamic infused strawberry panna cotta, all of which he had brought round to Will’s house so that they could spend the night there. The meal had been plated with the same care and devotion to detail as always, and Will had teased him mercilessly about it, even while demolishing every course. But he’d been tired, and had fallen asleep with his head in Hannibal’s lap as the Alpha read one of his psychology textbooks and the dogs kept them company…

‘Guess who dad was?’ Beverly continues, and Will drags himself back to the present, to the harsh lights and chemical smells of the morgue.

‘Fletcher Marshall,’ he says, nodding at the connection between the first and last victims. ‘Joel *Summers* is Joel *Marshall*.’

Price lifts the file in his hand.

‘Er, we did a DNA comparison between Fletcher Marshall and Joel Summers; no match.’ He hands it to Will to flick through and the Omega frowns.

‘So… Marshall’s son *wasn’t* his son?’ *That doesn’t make sense… Where’s the connection?*

‘The mom, Eleanor, was killed in a car accident, four years after Fletcher was killed,’ Zeller says, and Jack raises his eyebrows at him.

‘*Genuine* car accident?’ he checks, and Beverly shrugs.

‘If she was murdered, she would’ve been on the totem pole.’

Will grimaces, tilting his head at the rasp of claws through his hair.

‘Well, unless he *loved* her too much to disgrace her that way,’ he suggests. Jack looks at Beverly and her team again.

‘Was anyone ever convicted for Marshall’s murder?’ he asks, and it’s the Alpha herself who answers.

‘There was a man named Laurence Wells who was questioned twice in 1973. Never charged, still lives in Grafton.’

Will considers it, frowning down at Joel’s body. His shadow licks at his cheek, slithers up his spine and purrs.

I see you… I know you… Your body of work…

‘Fletcher Marshall was a crime of *passion*,’ he says. ‘It had something that none of the other murders had.’

It takes Jack a moment, but then he nods.

‘Motive.’

***

Later that evening, standing in Hannibal’s kitchen after the pathetically *tedious* arrest of Laurence Wells, Will shakes his head to rid himself of the smug satisfaction fading to shock and pallid horror when the old Alpha had realized he’d killed his own *son* by mistake.

‘I never want to end up like that,’ he mutters, setting his wine glass down on the counter. ‘Alone… Bitter… No family… Or, at least, *assuming* I have no family…’ He huffs and grimaces. ‘Can’t imagine saying that a few months ago…’

Hannibal glances up from slicing vegetables as Will sighs. Watches as his Omega squeezes his neck, just above the crest, trying to force his muscles to soften. Will is *crackling* with energy; tremors run up and down his spine and his belly rumbles with hunger, loud enough for Hannibal to hear. Nearing his heat, it’s understandable that his thoughts are turning towards children, even if he was against the concept before. His body is preparing for them, although the first heat after so many years on suppressants will likely be barren.

‘Have you been giving more thought to family, Will?’ he asks lightly, returning to his preparation.

Will frowns and steals a strip of pepper, crunching it as he considers the question. He leans back against the island, near enough to Hannibal that he can see the tendons flex in his Alpha’s arms with every stroke of the knife, and his mouth waters.

‘Um…’ He clears his throat, takes another sip of wine and then huffs a laugh at his own nervousness. ‘I *haven’t*, not really…’ He looks up at Hannibal from under his eyebrows. ‘Still not sure I’m the best person to, er, *share* genetics with.’

‘I disagree,’ Hannibal replies. He glances at Will, a hungry smile making his eyes gleam, and sees Will’s cheeks flush, the edges of his irises flaring bright copper. ‘In fact, if I were to share genes with anyone, Will, it would be with *you*.’

Heat snaps through him, making Will jolt. He can't help but stare at Hannibal, his heartbeat faltering at the implication of the words. He doesn't want to breathe; to break this moment, especially when Hannibal lifts his head and looks at him, his dark eyes molten with hunger. Everything in Will's gut tightens up and he swallows.

'Um…' He licks his lips, trying to get his brain to start working again, but he can't… He can't *think*… Hannibal and *him*? He… They…?

Hannibal sets the knife down and dries his hands on his apron, satisfaction warming his chest at Will's dumbstruck expression. For all their conversations, for their intimacy, their relationship with Abigail, the Omega hadn't considered the possibility of a *child* between them?

'Are you sure you can't stay tonight?' he purrs, dipping his head and grinning at his mate. Will's cheeks glow red and he stares at the floor, crossing his arms and then pushing his hands into his pockets.

'Er… Yeah… I… I have an early start tomorrow,' he says. 'And…' He sighs. 'It's been a few days since I slept by myself, so…'

'I understand,' Hannibal replies. He steps away from Will and goes to the fridge to fetch a dish of kidneys and a covered Tupperware bowl, which he hands to his Omega. Will takes it with a lopsided smile and makes a show of peeking under the lid.

'What's for dinner, Dr Lecter?' he teases, and Hannibal grins.

'It's a surprise,' he says. 'Warm it in the oven for at least half an hour when you get home.'

'Y'know, I *did* cook for myself before I met you,' Will points out, but he holds the container close to his chest as he speaks.

Hannibal merely shrugs.

'And yet you continue to indulge me,' he says, moving to a different part of the counter to flour and season the kidneys. 'For which I must thank you.'

'It helps that you're an excellent cook,' Will replies. He sets the Tupperware down for a moment so that he can give Hannibal a hug from behind, looping his arms around his mate's trim waist and snuggling up against his back. 'Mmm… Will you be alright without me for a night?'

'Hmmm… I'm not certain I can survive,' Hannibal jokes, deft hands never stopping their work even when Will leans up to kiss the bare skin between his hairline and shirt collar. '*Mm*… But I shall do my best. Your independence is important to you, after all.'

'It is,' Will agrees, forcing himself to let go of the other man. 'Thank you.' He lists closer again, resting his forehead between Hannibal's shoulder blades, and the Alpha holds very still, smirking to himself as a whimper claws at Will's throat.

Fuck... This is harder than he'd thought it would be… Will growls at his weakness and wrenches himself away from his mate.

'I have to *leave*,' he says shakily. 'I'll show myself out and I'll see you tomorrow evening.'

'My office,' Hannibal confirms. 'Seven thirty.' He turns, watching Will pick up his dinner and stride, gloriously defiant in the face of his biology, to the door. 'Good night, Will.'

Will pauses in the doorway, his chest *hurting* at the idea of driving out to Wolf Trap, alone. His throat closes up and he has to wait for a moment for his heart to find its way back to his ribcage before he can speak. Hannibal looks so *alone*, surrounded by polished chrome and dark wood cupboards, floured hands waiting to return to cooking an elaborate meal for one…

He quivers, *desperate* to run back to him, but he locks his knees and nods, instead. Smiles and lets his love for Hannibal warm his eyes.

'Good night, Dr Lecter.'

He's trembling when he gets to his car, and shaking hard enough to make his teeth chatter by the time he reaches Wolf Trap. Will wipes sweat from his brow and grips the steering wheel tight as he fights the gnawing, *stabbing* urge to turn the car around and return to his Alpha.

He can do this… Being pair bonded doesn't mean his whole life has to change… It doesn't mean he can't still be *him*. He can live on his farm, with his dogs, work for the FBI and go fishing… Hannibal isn't controlling him, isn't demanding that he *change* to be with him…

He wants to have children with me...

Will sinks to his knees and hugs Winston close as the dogs greet him at the door. The brown collie-cross licks the salty tears from his cheeks and Will slides his hands through the thick fur of his collar, burying his face near Winston's ear and holding his breath to stop himself keening for Hannibal.

Fifty-one miles… He's less than a hundred miles away… Less than an hour away...

Buster paws at the Tupperware lid and Will snaps his fingers.

'Tssst!'

The little terrier backs away at the reprimand and Will stands up, wiping his cheeks dry. He shrugs out of his coat and takes his dinner into the kitchen. Hannibal said it needed an hour…

When he opens it, Will smiles down at the steak and kidney pie his Alpha has made for him, marveling at the delicate leaves and vines that the other man managed to create from pastry.

There are heating instructions tucked into the rim of the lid, and Will covers the bowl before sliding it into the oven. Then, because he has time to kill, he has a long shower while it cooks, turning the water up to scalding in an attempt to melt the ache from his bones.

He sits at the table, reading over his lesson notes in preparation for tomorrow's lecture while he eats. But he can't stop his knee from bouncing, and he keeps looking over at the front door as if expecting Hannibal to walk through any minute.

I miss you…

The pastry is buttery and light, melting on his tongue between mouthfuls of rich filling, and Will forgets his notes in favor of enjoying every mouthful. He wants to call Hannibal, to tell him that he's ruined him for all other food, but won't let himself. He doesn't need to; he just *wants* to hear his voice, but it's not good to be too dependent on the other man.

Maybe he should go for a walk with the dogs…

Will tops up his glass of whiskey. Knocks it back and is reaching for the bottle again before he's fully aware of what he's doing. When he does, he growls at himself, and pushes up from the table to take the empty bowl into the kitchen.

Maybe he'll go fishing at the weekend, and take trout with him to Hannibal's…

He starts when he sees his reflection in the dark window above the sink. His cheeks are red and he's glowing with perspiration, his wet hair clinging to his forehead. He must still be hot from the shower…

Will peers at his eyes; watching as his pupils blow wide, black fighting blue, hemmed in by bright gold. Heat flows through him and he shudders, grabbing hold of the counter to stay standing. His crest throbs and he bares his teeth at himself. He looks feral. Vicious…

He likes it.

Clawing at the buttons of his shirt, snapping threads in his haste to get it away from his burning skin, Will pushes the damp cotton from his shoulders, down his arms, and lets it drop to the floor. Watches his reflection as he runs his hands over his chest, over the fading bruises still darkening his nipples.

He groans to himself, sliding his hand lower, gathering up sweat and rubbing it between his fingers. Unbuckles his belt and slides his zipper down, shoving at the damp waistband of his boxers to get it all off him, *now*, because he's too *hot* and it's too much for his body to deal with.

Hannibal…

He steps out of his clothes and wanders towards the bed. Considers standing outside for a few minutes just to cool off, but dismisses it in favor of opening a drawer and removing one of the white t-shirts that Hannibal washed for him. It smells like *him*, like *his* detergent, like *his* house…

Their life together… Will feels a whimper lodge in his throat as he rubs his cheek back and forth across the fabric. It's softer than normal, and he gathers up a second one to wear so that he can surround himself with his Alpha's smell, in his hands and on his body. Pulls on boxers

and then crawls beneath the covers, burrowing into Hannibal's pillow and layering blankets and sheets over him. Around him; supporting and shielding him. Hiding him from the world.

His eyes are already growing heavy and he's purring by the time he realizes he's made a *nest*. When he does, he almost wants to shove everything away and stretch out, but Hannibal left him these extra covers on purpose, so that he'd do exactly this… So that he'd feel *safe*…

Will rolls his eyes. *Fuck you, Hannibal*, he thinks fondly, smiling to himself.

Fucking Alphas...

***

'Killing somebody… It feels that bad?'

Abigail's face is lined with pain and tears well in her eyes as she looks up at him. Lost. Frightened. Because of him.

Will's not asleep – he keeps slipping in and out of tense dreams– and the memory cuts him with its clarity.

'I'm worried about nightmares,' Abigail whispers, and Will flinches at the sting of a thousand cuts across his skin, remembering his own fear of sleeping after killing Hobbs.

Hannibal's voice purrs from the darkness, stroking his cheek, soothing him and filling him with warmth, drenching his skin with fresh sweat.

'We'll help you with the nightmares…'

Will rolls over in his nest, swallowing the lump in his throat, and curls up with his back to Hannibal's side of the bed. If he bunches up the covers and pretends hard enough, he can imagine his Alpha behind him, holding him against a broad chest. Can feel warm breath puffing across his neck as strong hands twined with his own… Hear Hannibal's heartbeat loud in the silence. Protecting him. Keeping the nightmares at bay.

Fourteen hours, Will thinks, nuzzling the pillow and gripping the t-shirt tight in his fist. He'll see his Alpha in fourteen hours…

I can do this.

***

He's not sure why needs to see it, but after his classes that day, Will finds himself in the morgue, staring down at Nicholas Boyle's dead body.

He's exhausted, his temples spiking with a headache that won't shift no matter how many heat suppressants or aspirin he takes, and Will closes a quivering hand around his can of Beta spray.

What are you telling me, Nick?

The air down here is cold, and it smells like antiseptic, so finding the dark current is easy. Sickly sweet and warm as bath water, it croons to his shadow as it flows around Nicholas Boyle…

Darkness twines around Will's legs, licking at his belly before settling into his heart, making it skip a beat before it settles into a heavy, slow rhythm.

He closes his eyes, wades into the river and… He's *there*.

Nicholas Boyle sits up, the grey cover sliding back from his frost-bitten, chewed up and decaying body… He gets down from the table, dressed in the clothes he wore that day he followed them to Abigail's house…

Will can't run. He's stuck in place…

Please… Please don't hurt me…

Panic claws at him. Twists his mind. He's bringing the hunting knife up already and it just slides into Nicholas's stomach. He grips it with two hands, fighting not to let go, and –

Abigail stares back at him. She brings the knife up and it's in *him*, gutting him, slicing him open the way she'd cut a deer… She didn't mean to, not *really*… She can't have… But he wouldn't stop coming for her…

Will jerks back to himself with a gasp, breathing hard and fighting nausea. He stares around, wild eyes swinging back and forth over the corpse on the table before him, to the empty room, the door… His heart batters his ribcage and his mind races in a desperate attempt to deny the truth of what he knows. What he *understands*.

Abigail killed Nicholas Boyle… Gutted him… And she lied to him about it.

Bile scratches his throat. He scrubs his palms on his trousers. He feels *dirty*… Because she *couldn't* have done this alone…

How could I be so blind?

Will turns on his heel and strides out of the room.

He needs to talk to Hannibal.

***

Sat at his desk, Hannibal lets the haunting sound of the choir serenade flow around him as he adds layers of graphite shading to his sketch. His night apart from Will has left him melancholy, and he is drawing a memory from his studies in Paris, the music adding to his somber mood. The endlessly content part of him, the one who simply appreciates the music for its beauty and the artistry flowing from his fingers, is still present, but Will is awakening more feelings in him than he'd expected, and Hannibal can't help but reflect on their conversation about family.

What sort of father do I want to be? What do I want to teach my children?

He is pulled from his thoughts, however, when the office door opens and Will appears. Hannibal glances up, noting the tightness of his Omega's jaw, his flicking eyes and rounded shoulders. He's early; his session doesn't start for another hour.

He's upset.

Hannibal stops sketching and holds his pencil between both hands, giving his mate his full attention. Smells a hint of death and chemicals in the air and he understands. Will has been to the morgue; seen the body.

He *knows*.

When he speaks, Hannibal hears the resignation in his voice. *The time for innocence is past*.

'Hello, Will.'

Will enters the room slowly, hands twitching at his sides, his head bowed because his Alpha isn't going to like what he's about to say.

'Abigail Hobbs *killed* Nick Boyle.'

Hannibal is quiet, taking a moment to appreciate Will's ability to *understand*, to *see* the truth. Then,

'Yes, I know,' he says heavily, and Will nods. His heart is beating very fast in his chest and he can't seem to catch his breath. His voice shakes when he speaks.

'Tell me *why* you know?'

'I helped her dispose of the body,' Hannibal replies, his dark eyes never once leaving Will's face. He deserves honesty and respect, and he *sees* the shadow rear up within his mate, propelling the Omega forwards to approach the desk, his hands curled into fists at his sides. Smells the smoky tang thicken his scent and hears his own darkness purr as Will growls,

'Evidently *not well enough*.'

Hannibal rolls the pencil between his fingers, considering his options.

'Have you told Jack Crawford?' he asks.

Will shakes his head.

'No.'

'Why not?' Hannibal asks, and Will's throat catches around a whimper as grief rakes his insides.

'Because I was hoping it wasn't *true*,' he replies, his voice wobbling.

His pain reminds Hannibal that, as much as he sees their darkness, his Omega *wants* to believe the best in everyone, and he grimaces. Sets the pencil down and touches, considers and discards his scalpel. *It's not that simple…*

Hannibal stands up with a sigh, moving closer to the edge of his desk as he speaks.

'Well, now you know the truth.'

'Do I?' Will asks, desperate to believe him but unable to blindly trust the answer.

'Everything you know about that night is true, except the end,' Hannibal says, keeping the lamp and the corner of the desk between them so as not to crowd the fretting Omega. 'Nicholas Boyle attacked us,' he continues. 'Abigail's only crime was to defend herself, and I lied about it.'

'Why?' Will whispers, and Hannibal scoffs.

'You know *why*,' he replies, and Will looks away. 'Because Jack Crawford would hang her for what her father's done,' Hannibal explains. 'And the world would burn Abigail in his place. That would be the story. That would be what Freddie Lounds writes.'

He senses a sliver of acceptance as Will glances back at him, and takes a step closer, moving carefully so as not to startle him. When Will walks away to stare out of the window, Hannibal knows that he can close the distance, and he speaks while he walks.

'Abigail's no more a killer than you are for shooting her father. Or I am for the death of Tobias Budge.'

'It isn't our place to decide!' Will protests, but Hannibal shakes his head.

'If not ours, then *whose*?' He comes to stand next to Will, enough that he can see the movement in his throat when his Omega swallows. 'Who knows Abigail better than you and I?' he persists. '*Or* the burden she bears?' He leans closer and adds, '*We* are her fathers, now. We have to serve her better than Garrett Jacob Hobbs.'

Will quivers at this, his breath catching as he remembers their conversation from the other night. But he doesn't say anything; he doesn't know *what* to say, and Hannibal turns half away to stare across his office, his hands in his pockets. He sighs.

'If you go to Jack, then you murder Abigail's future,' he says quietly. Looks at his Omega again, trying to read the expression on Will's face. But his mate is guarded, and Hannibal feels his stomach flutter with nerves.

I can't sense what you're thinking…

'Do I need to call my lawyer, Will?' he asks, surprised by the *fear* he feels at the idea of Will rejecting him. Of betraying him.

Fuck…

The uncertainty in Hannibal's voice is like a punch in the gut, and Will can't help but turn to him. Hannibal waits for his answer; he doesn't even realize how *vulnerable* he's made himself…

Very deliberately, Will shakes his head. He can't bring himself to *say* it, but he can't, he *won't*, betray family.

Born in blood…

Relief floods Hannibal, but he has to make Will understand the extent of his decision.

'We can tell no one,' he says, and Will turns away again. Stares out of the window, the streetlamp casting half his face into shadow.

Hannibal steps up behind him and gives his shoulder a squeeze; a reward for his loyalty.

'What we are doing here is the right thing,' the Alpha murmurs. 'In time, this will be the only story any of us cares to tell.'

None of us is innocent…

Will swallows the lump in his throat, clamping down on the whimper that wants to bubble up when Hannibal lets go of him and moves away. He can't look at him… But he can't stand the idea of not being with him…

This is so fucked up…

'Why didn't you tell me?' he asks, prompting Hannibal to pause by his desk and look back at him.

'We wanted to protect you,' the Alpha replies, and Will nods. He waits a while longer, still staring out at his car parked outside, trying to understand how he feels, before he gives up and wanders to his usual armchair. Shrugs out of his coat, draping it over the couch, and sinks down into the leather cushions with a sigh.

'I feel like I can't trust my judgment, anymore,' he says tiredly. 'Of Abigail… of you…'

'I want you to trust me, Will,' Hannibal replies, bowing his head and watching his Omega from the corner of his eye. 'Know that everything I do, I do with your best interest at heart.'

Will hums, but he doesn't sound convinced, and Hannibal draws closer.

'Would you have turned us in?' he asks softly, prompting Will to frown up at him. 'Had you known that night… Would you have told Jack Crawford about us?'

Will opens his mouth to answer but the words stick. He rubs his fingertips together and then wipes his palms on his knees, blowing out his breath.

'Um… I… don't know,' he replies, and Hannibal nods. He tilts his head, studying his mate.

‘Your feelings for Abigail have grown,’ he comments. ‘What started as an obligation born of guilt for killing her father has developed into something else, just as your attraction for me has changed.’

‘I’m *evolving*,’ Will murmurs, and Hannibal’s eyes gleam.

You are. And I can’t wait to see what you become.

***

‘I feel *terrible*, Miss Lounds,’ Hannibal says, returning from the kitchen with a fresh plate of salad for his guest. ‘It never entered my head you might be a vegetarian. A lapse on my behalf.’

He places the dish before the red headed Alpha, sensing Will’s smarting resentment of her presence at their dinner table. However, Abigail has decided to tell her story, and Hannibal wants to be supportive. This meal is also a way of warning the journalist to care for their daughter.

‘*Research* always delivers benefits,’ Freddie replies, lifting a piece of lotus root to her mouth.

Across the table from her, close enough to Hannibal that their feet touch, Will glares at her. He’s freshly sprayed with Beta pheromones and, in addition to adding a dozen Iris Inhibitor drops to each eye, is also wearing his glasses. Anything to act as a barrier between himself and the journalist before him.

‘And if it contradicts a good story, hell, publish it anyway,’ he says bitterly, and Freddie smirks.

‘Are you still angry I called you insane?’ she replies. ‘The libel laws *are* clear, Mr Graham.’

‘*Insinuation* is such a *grey* area,’ Will spits, stabbing at a piece of tenderloin. Hannibal grins, barely repressing a purr at how *fierce* his mate is. How *gloriously* aggressive…

‘Insane isn’t really *black* or *white*, is it?’ Freddie shrugs. ‘We’re all pathological in our own ways.’

‘You *choose* the version of the truth that suits you best,’ Will growls, wishing the meat between his teeth was Freddie’s throat. ‘And pursue it *pathologically*.’

A delicate sip of wine covers Hannibal’s need to snigger because that would be rude.

‘Everybody decides their own versions of the truth,’ Freddie reasons, and then she smiles at the Beta sat beside her. ‘*I’m* here because I want to tell *Abigail’s* version of the truth.’

Abigail smiles and then ducks her head shyly. Will swallows, his anger burning out as he resigns himself to her decision.

‘See that you do,’ he mutters, trying hard not to make it sound like he’s *pleading* with Freddie.

‘*I* don’t have anything to hide,’ Abigail says lightly; a classic Beta move to appease the Alphas around her, *and* allay any suspicions about her. Will’s stomach drops because it’s *exactly* the wrong thing to say, proven when Freddie picks suspiciously carefully at her salad.

‘Hm…’ Freddie smiles. ‘Everyone has *something* to hide.’

Will glances up at her from under worried brows, his chest tight.

Don’t suspect… Please, please don’t know…

He looks at Abigail, at Nick Boyle’s *killer*, and fear snatches his voice. Hannibal can taste the salty undertone in his scent, and slides his foot slightly closer, offering Will the comfort of his presence.

Freddie, ignoring to the wordless exchange around her, continues to forage on her plate.

‘*But* I won’t tell anything you don’t want me to,’ she says, looking at Abigail with a gentle smile.

‘You must understand our concerns,’ Hannibal says, leaning closer to her. ‘We care about Abigail. Our only thought is to protect her.’

Freddie sets her fork down, challenging Hannibal with the tilt of her head.

‘She’s already exposed,’ she says sharply. ‘Her silence until now has been taken as guilt. *This* book is about her innocence. I want Abigail to have a future.’

‘That’s what we *all* want,’ Will says, taking a sip of Malbec to wash away the bitter aftertaste of his exchange with the Alpha. He doesn’t want to ruin the delicate flavor of the meat that Hannibal has prepared.

‘Well,’ Hannibal says brightly, glancing around the table. ‘We all want what’s best for Abigail.’

Abigail looks from him to Will, her fork paused near the thin slices of tenderloin, and Hannibal smells the change in her scent as she realizes the Omega knows...

‘*This* is possibly the finest salad I’ve ever eaten in my life,’ Freddie says, adding beet to her mouthful of lotus. ‘Shame to ruin it with all that meat.’

Will meets her gaze as he lifts another forkful of loin to his lips, and Hannibal’s eyes shine as his Omega makes a show of chewing slowly.

‘*Mmm*.’ Will’s lip curls at Freddie, and then he smiles at Hannibal. ‘It’s perfect.’

Freddie narrows her eyes at him, and at the exchange between the two men.

‘I’ve always found eating meat to be unnecessarily cruel,’ she comments, and Will snorts.

‘That’s rich; coming from you,’ he mutters. Before Freddie can respond, though, Hannibal lifts up a forkful of loin, idly inspecting it as he speaks.

‘Many animals eat the flesh of others,’ he murmurs. ‘Perhaps it’s not the eating of meat that is cruel, but humanity itself. Our treatment of those in our care, and of ourselves.’

My treatment of Will is cruel, he thinks, glancing at his mate and smiling as he places the meat on his tongue, letting the flavor melt into his mouth before he chews. *But I know he can survive, and that it will be worth it.*

He can feel the Omega’s eyes on his throat when he swallows, and he has to resist the urge to reach over and hold Will’s hand on the table. He *highly* doubts that the other man wants to reveal the extent of their relationship with Freddie Lounds just yet.

He looks at Freddie and Abigail, at the journalist’s faintly queasy look, and grins.

‘So, have you thought of a title for your book, yet?’

***

Tidying up together in the kitchen after dinner, Abigail pauses polishing a wineglass as her hands start to shake.

‘Will knows, doesn’t he?’ she asks, prompting Hannibal to glance back at her from drying plates at the sink.

‘He knows you killed Nicholas Boyle, yes.’

Abigail sniffs, and sets the glass down to pick up another.

‘What am I gonna do?’ she asks, her voice shaking.

‘He will keep our secret,’ Hannibal replies, but Abigail shakes her head.

‘You don’t know that.’

‘He will keep it, because otherwise the one good thing in his life is tainted,’ Hannibal says, wiping down the counter and then folding his towel. ‘And he will lie to Jack Crawford about you, *just* as he has lied to himself. You’re free, Abigail. No one will know what you did.’ He turns, watching as Abigail braces herself on the counter, her shoulders shaking. He tilts his head. ‘And no one will know the truth you’re trying to avoid,’ he says softly.

Abigail’s breath catches, and Hannibal draws closer, looking down at her. At his daughter. At the young woman with a fledgling shadow inside her, straining against the cage of her guilt and expectation… He wants to free her, just as he is freeing Will.

‘The one you cannot admit… even to yourself,’ he murmurs, and he watches as Abigail’s control slips and tears well in her blue eyes. Her breath quivers and, when she speaks, her voice is so choked with grief that it’s barely legible. Hannibal’s eyes glint like rubies.

‘I can’t hear you –’ he prompts, and a tear rolls down Abigail’s pale cheek.

‘I *helped* him,’ she repeats, blank eyes staring at nothing as the dam breaks and the truth comes pouring out of her. ‘I *knew* what my father was; I *knew* what he did. I… I *knew*…’

Hannibal waits, watching the turmoil within the young woman before him. *So much responsibility*…

‘I was the one who…’ Abigail falters and swallows. Licks her lips. Tries again. ‘… Met the girls. Talked to them… *Laughed* and *joked*…’ She quivers, fighting sickness. ‘Found out … Where they *lived*… Where they were *going*… When they’d be *alone*…’ More tears splash down her face as she shakes her head. ‘Girls that looked just like me.’ She whimpers. ‘They could’ve been my friends… I… I c-couldn’t say “no” to him… I *knew*… I knew it was them or me…’

She turns to Hannibal and falls against his chest when he opens his arms to her. Her tears dampen the silk of his blue waistcoat but he doesn’t care; just holds her close as she sobs against him, stroking her hair and inhaling the smell of her shampoo and her smoky, coppery scent. She reminds him of Will; dark woods, hunting and the thrill of the chase… It’s exactly how he imagines his own daughter would smell.

‘I wondered when you would tell me,’ he murmurs.

‘I’m a monster,’ Abigail whispers, chewing her knuckles to keep from crying too loud because Will is in the other room, and she doesn’t want him to hear her. She doesn’t want to tell him *this*.

‘No,’ Hannibal says, remembering the sound that Cassie Boyle made when he ripped her chest open to cut out her lungs. The fear in her eyes… The pain *Will’s* eyes when he admitted that he was losing his mind… ‘I know what monsters are.’ He hugs her tight. ‘You’re a victim. And Will and I..?’

Hannibal rests his cheek on the top of her head. He thinks of his mate’s dark fury at Jack’s suspicion of Abigail, his defensive body language and the gentle musk in his scent whenever he’s around his surrogate daughter… *You love her, Will.*

‘We’re going to protect you.’

Buffet Froid

Chapter Summary

Fast approaching heat, Will's mental health continues to sharply decline, and when a vivid hallucination causes him to contaminate the crime scene of a murdered Alpha, Hannibal takes him to see an Omega Specialist, and old residency colleague.

But, although a scan reveals that Will is suffering due to the rapid detox of heat suppressants, Hannibal convinces Dr Sutcliffe to lie and say that he found no problems, allowing Hannibal to continue using Will's symptoms to twist him into the killer he wants him to become.

TEN

'Hello, Will.'

Hearing his Alpha's voice soothes him enough that Will can release a slow, shaky breath, and he manages a tired smile as he ducks into Hannibal's office on Thursday evening. He hands Hannibal his coat, and waits for the other man to hang it up before he leans in to kiss him, resting his hands on Hannibal's hips before looping his arms around his waist to hug him.

Hannibal holds Will close, nuzzling his curls to soak up the scent of him. It's dull beneath the residual taint of Beta pheromones, and he sighs, rubbing between Will's shoulder blades to soothe him after almost two days apart – since the night they hosted Freddy and Abigail. His mate looks exhausted – there's no rest for an isolated Omega – and his sea-green shirt hangs loose from his bowed shoulders. He's not been eating and his body is burning through his fat reserves as it prepares for heat…

'Please, take a seat,' Hannibal says, guiding Will to their armchairs. 'Would you like a drink?'

Will shakes his head. He's tense; he can't get rid of this need to move, to *do* something… He sits down as he's told, grinding his back teeth against the headache crushing his skull, and taps the armrest, rolling his neck and feeling the tendons crunch against each other.

'So,' Hannibal says, undoing the button of his burgundy suit jacket as he sits. He crosses one long leg over the other, holding his knee as he looks at his mate. 'Tell me, Will; how are you feeling today?'

Will huffs, his copper-ringed eyes flaring bright.

‘How am I *feeling?*’

‘Yes.’

Will scoffs, pursing his lips as he thinks of a suitable answer. When he speaks, his voice quivers with anger and fear.

‘I can feel my nerves… Clicking like roller-coaster cogs… Pulling up to the *inevitable* long plunge,’ he says, and Hannibal quirks an eyebrow.

‘Quick sounds. Quickly ended,’ he replies.

Will jerks his head in an attempt at a nod.

‘Abigail Hobbs *ended* Nicholas Boyle,’ he says, grimacing at the memory of it. ‘Like a *burst* balloon.’ He blinks away the *ridiculous* urge to cry and rubs his fingertips together to keep from balling his hand into a fist. ‘She took a life.’

Hannibal controls his emotional response to the pain etched into his mate’s face. He needs to remains calm and dispassionate; a void for Will to pour his feelings into.

‘You’ve taken a life,’ he reminds him, and Will nods, a muscle jumping in his jaw.

‘Yeah… Yeah, so have you.’

Hannibal watches him for a moment, his expression unreadable, dark eyes piercing through Will’s defenses and leaving him naked.

‘You’re grieving, Will,’ his Alpha says. When Will tries to scoff, Hannibal continues, ‘Not for the life you have taken, but for the life that was taken *from* you.’

A moment’s confusion creases his Omega’s brow, and Hannibal explains,

‘If Abigail could have started over, left the horror of her father behind, so could you. You could untangle yourself from the madness and the murder.’

Will looks away, his eyes flickering as though seeking an escape. There’s a tightness in his throat, threatening to dissolve into tears, and he *hates* it. Hates the way his heart is losing its rhythm every few beats.

‘We *lied* for her,’ he whispers.

‘We both know the unreality of taking a life,’ Hannibal replies. ‘Of people who die when we have no other choice.’

Locking eyes with Will, Hannibal allows his shadow to mingle with the prickling red of his irises and sits forwards.

‘We know, in those moments, they are not flesh, but light and air and color,’ he purrs.

Will smiles sadly and tilts his head.

‘Isn’t *that* what it is to be alive?’

Hannibal narrows his eyes, considering him.

‘Do you feel alive, Will?’

The question makes him pause, and Will swallows. He wets his lips, blinking to clear the haze from his vision. Because he doesn’t… He doesn’t feel alive… He’s not himself anymore… He’s not *anyone* anymore... The dark current always pulls at him, always calls for him, and even though he’s been fighting so hard to stay *him*, to stay *whole*, he’s *nothing* without Hannibal… Without his Alpha…

The words come out before he’s even meant them to; before he can keep his voice from cracking.

‘I feel like I’m fading.’

Hannibal nods slowly. This is to be expected; Will is newly bonded, and suffering from acute detoxification. It’s a testament to his strength that he’s doing so well – that he can remember who he is at all.

‘Have you experienced any further loss of time or hallucinations?’ he asks, and Will looks away, his gaze distant, scared, before he remembers to nod and answer.

‘… Yeah.’

Hannibal feels a flicker of curiosity at the extent of his Omega’s neurological impairment.

‘I’d like you to draw a clock face,’ he says, rising to fetch his notebook and pen from his desk. ‘Numbered. Small hand indicating the hour, large hand the minute.’

He holds it out to Will, but his mate looks at him suspiciously, lips twitching into a smile as though expecting a joke.

‘Why?’

‘An exercise,’ Hannibal replies, and Will obeys, opening the book to a fresh page. Hannibal continues to speak as he returns to his chair. ‘I want you to focus on the present moment,’ he lies. ‘The now. Often as you can, think of where you are, and when. Think of *who* you are.’

Will checks his watch and sighs. This is stupid. He knows where he is: he’s with his Alpha. He knows *who* he is: he’s Hannibal’s Omega.

He scrawls a clock face and scribbles down the numbers as fast as he can.

‘It’s 7.16pm,’ he mutters. ‘I’m in Baltimore, Maryland…’ Sighs again. ‘And my name is Will Graham.’

‘A simple reminder,’ Hannibal says, ignoring Will’s sarcastic tone. ‘The handle to reality for you to hold on to.’

He leans forwards as Will reaches out to hand him the book, and looks down at the page, at the numbers off-center and lines overlapping…

He stares at the evidence of his Omega’s suffering, right on schedule.

‘… And know you’re alive…’

***

The next morning dawns bright and cold. Ideal fishing conditions, and perfectly timed with an extra day off work. Hannibal’s coming over this evening, and Will’s been out in the river since seven. He’s caught three big trout; perfect for… whatever it is that Hannibal said he was going to make.

Will’s sweating from the walk back to the house. He kicks the kitchen door open and lets the fish rest on newspaper while he showers and gets changed into a cotton shirt and pants. The sunlight filtering through the net curtains hits his back and he feels fresh beads of perspiration tickle the nape of his neck.

Please don’t let there be a murder today, he thinks, pulling the hook from the trout’s mouth. *I just want to spend time with my Alpha… I need some time alone with him…*

He lays the fish down on the counter and reaches into the drawer for his filleting knife. This is the messy part, but he’s hardly squeamish. He holds the fish steady and begins to slice into its belly, spilling cold, dark blood across the wood.

Alpha…

Will stills. Something’s wrong… He doesn’t feel… Doesn’t feel right…

His shadow whispers to him. Heat licks at his crest, making it tingle and throb. The current rises, pulling him down into darkness as gold flecks dance behind his eyes. He’s sinking… Disappearing into the sickly sweet stench of death…

You’re not my Alpha… You’re not my mate…

‘Oh, *darlin’*…’

His heart races. It’s deafening. He can’t breathe. Every gasp ripples the air in front of him. Sweat plasters his hair to his scalp and the soft fabric of his jersey top rasps across the ridges of his crest, making his eyes water with pain.

His crest… Oh God… Coby… Samuel Coby… Did he…? Is *he*…?

Fuck… I don’t… Is Hannibal my Alpha, or is Coby?

No… No…

Blood pours from the Alpha's face. It's been split nearly in two. She's drowning. Her eyes glow red, but she doesn't look angry; she looks… *sorry*. And scared. *So* scared…

I don't know who you are anymore… I don't know…

Will's shaking. Fighting with her as she tries to push him off… As she tries to reach up for his crest –

And then… It's gone. Will jerks back to himself, freezing cold and staring into the face of his dead Alpha.

Not *his* Alpha… His *victim*…

What the…? What's he *doing* here? He's supposed to be at home… He's…

Will drops her arms and throws himself away from the corpse. Slips in the blood on the floor and staggers against the bedroom door. He can't *breathe*. He can't *think*. Panic chokes him. His brain is spiraling out of control and he can't stop making these strange whimpering gasps as he calls for Hannibal. For help.

He's still holding the knife. Will throws it to the side and wrenches open the door. He has to get out of here. He has to… Has to…

Jack, Beverly and her team all look up, startled, when he falls out into the hallway, his arms smeared with blood, eyes wild and panting hard. He's soaked with sweat and shivering, and Beverly's eyes flicker red. She's the first to take a step forwards.

'Will?'

But Will can't answer her. His throat has closed up, locked around his gasps, and all he can do is shake. He holds up his hands, half surrender, half plea to let him past so he can wash them, and they step aside for him to stumble his way downstairs.

Rinsing the red from his hands in the kitchen sink, Will tries to scrub the feeling of death from under his nails.

There is something seriously wrong with me.

He hears Jack's footsteps, worryingly slow and steady, and smells anger sharpening the Alpha's scent. He glances up, keeping enough of his back to him that Jack won't see the crest at the edge of his sweater, and watches as Jack glares at him before storming outside.

Follow.

The command is silent, but it rings in Will's ears, and he shivers as he dries his hands on the dishcloth. He stares at them, at the palms and fingers that he used to *kill* the Alpha… Sighs and closes his eyes. *I didn't do it… It was a memory*…

He has to talk to Jack. Explain himself. Will grabs his coat and pulls it on as he steps out onto the porch. It's snowing, and everyone else is wrapped up in scarves and gloves. The cold air

feels good on his flushed skin, but he zips himself up anyway. A layer of protection.

Jack is furious. He clenches his hands in and out of fists, his back to Will so as not to bare his teeth or show him his rage-red eyes. But Will can *tell*. He can smell it and feel it; sharp waves of black anger pouring off him.

'What *happened* in there?' the Alpha asks, pointing back at the house.

'I got confused,' Will mutters, staring down at his shoes. He does *not* want to deal with Jack right now. He just wants to go home… to Hannibal.

'I've seen you confused, and I've seen you upset, but I've never seen you *afraid* like this,' Jack argues, staring into Will's pale, shadowed face.

Will shoves his hands into his pockets; he can't stand the feel of them, like oil coating his skin. Tainted.

'Well, I'm an old hand at *fear*,' he bites. 'I can manage this one, I just got… disoriented. I can go back in.'

'I saw the look on your face when you came out of that room,' Jack growls. 'Now, what did you *experience* in there that's got you… *mute* all of a sudden?'

'I can *see* and *hear* better afraid,' Will points out, looking out at the drifting snow, gritting his teeth to keep from snarling at Jack. 'I- I just can't *speak* as *concisely*.'

'Will, you *contaminated* the crime scene,' Jack says, turning towards him, worry softening the dark rage from his face. 'You've never done that before.'

Will hesitates. He swallows, but he doesn't know how else to say it.

'I thought I was *responsible* for it,' he explains.

'What are you saying?' Jack demands, turning fully to stare up at him. 'Are you saying you thought you *killed* that Alpha in there?'

Will sighs. *You don't understand*...

'Sometimes with, er, *what* I do –'

'What you *do*, is you take all of the evidence available at a crime scene,' Jack says, speaking deliberately so as to remind Will that he doesn't want any of this Omegan 'resonances' and 'empathy' bullshit. 'You *extrapolate*.' His eyes flicker red. 'You reconstruct the *thinking* of a killer. You don't think of *yourself* as the killer.'

'I got *lost* in the *reconstruction*,' Will snaps, glad that he's on such good Iris Inhibitor drops because otherwise his eyes would be golden by now. 'Just for a second. Just a *blink*.'

Jack nods slowly.

‘I know you don’t like to be the cause for concern, but I am officially concerned about you,’ he says.

‘*Officially?*’ Will can’t, and *won’t*, keep the sarcasm from his quivering voice.

‘Yes, that’s right,’ Jack replies, and Will nods. Descends the steps of the farmhouse as he speaks.

‘Hm. I thought the *reason* you had me seeing Dr Lecter and not an FBI psychiatrist is so my mental wellbeing stays…’ He narrows his eyes and shrugs, all but baring his teeth at the Alpha. ‘*Unofficial*.’

‘I just wanna be careful with you,’ Jack says, speaking more softly now that Will’s standing up to him. ‘We don’t wanna break you here… Is that what’s happening? Have I broken you?’

Will considers the question, considers the hallucinations, the nightmares, the loss of time… Grimaces and raises his eyebrows at Jack.

‘Do you *have* anyone that does this better *unbroken* than *I* do broken?’ he points out, and smirks at him when the Alpha has no good answer to that.

Jack sighs.

‘Fear makes you rude, Will.’

Guilt tickles his gut and Will has to wait for a while before he can go back inside. Jack takes himself off to calm down, so, when he can’t wait for his heart to slow down anymore, Will returns, alone, to the bedroom.

Beverly and her team have moved in and are cataloguing the forensic evidence. A camera shutter clicks, and Will hears Zeller’s voice before he sees them.

‘Her name was Beth LeBeau,’ the Beta says. ‘She drowned on her own blood.’

‘And what she *didn’t* drown on is all over the floor, and under the bed,’ Price says, crouched down to get a better view of the scene. He looks up when Will steps through the doorway. ‘She was trying to hide from him.’

Will shakes his head.

‘He dragged her there,’ he says, pointing to the floral covers. ‘He was waiting under the bed for her.’

‘Fought to claw her way out,’ Beverly says, picking up a torn nail from the floorboards.

‘He knew her,’ Will says, looking down at the smashed and ripped up photographs. ‘Someone who cared about her; or *thought* he did.’

‘He cared too much,’ Beverly mutters.

‘So, we’re looking for boyfriends, ex-boyfriends, co-workers… The guy who bags her groceries,’ Jack says, coming to stand a short distance from Will. Keeping an eye on him.

‘I’ve got a clean set of prints on the knife handle,’ Price says, holding the weapon up with his blue gloved hands and peering at it with his magnifying glass. ‘I assume they’re yours,’ he adds, looking up at Will.

‘Sorry,’ Will mutters, and Price nods.

‘Mm. There’s other dermal tissue; presumably from the killer’s. The skin is so diseased or damaged it didn’t leave *any* useful prints.’

‘Victim scratched her killer deep enough to pile tissue under the fingernails,’ Beverly says curiously, holding up the dead Alpha’s hand to examine the fingers. ‘Never drew blood.’

‘Why didn’t he bleed?’ Jack asks, thinking aloud.

‘After he cut up the victim’s face, looks like he was trying to pull her skin back,’ Zeller says, frowning down at the body.

I don’t know you…

The memory tickles Will on the back of his neck and he turns.

‘Like he was removing a mask?’ he asks, and he stares down at Beth, at the Alpha… *I don’t recognize you anymore…*

‘Could be,’ Zeller says, shrugging.

Will nods, frowning as *something* teases him, just out of reach. He scrubs his cheeks and pops a couple of heat suppressants to help with the headache making him queasy, ignoring the look that Beverly and Jack exchange when they assume he won’t notice. Grits his teeth to keep from calling them on it and wanders around the room, instead, looking at the horse models, the equestrian art and the riding boots, still caked with mud, in the corner. There’s a sadness here… A loss…

I want to come home…

‘Will?’

He glances up, his heart lodging in his throat at the sound of Beverly’s voice. Did he lose time again?

‘Yeah?’ he asks warily, and relief is like a knife between the ribs when he realizes he was just deep in thought.

‘We’re gonna get the body out now; you need anything else?’ Beverly says.

‘Er… No… No, I think I’m done,’ Will says, nodding a couple of times, his eyes still searching the room.

Beverly tilts her head and looking up at him from under worried brows.

‘You okay?’

‘Yeah… Yeah…’ Will tries for a smile, but he knows it’s more of an unhappy twist of the lips, and he clears his throat, ducking his head to avoid her eyes. ‘I’m, er… I’m gonna *go*…’

‘Sure,’ Beverly says. ‘See you tomorrow, Will.’ She turns to watch him go, and as he reaches the door, calls after him, ‘Take care of yourself, won’t you?’

Will pauses and glances back at her. At Jack and Jimmy Price and Zeller… Swallows and tries for a final nod but he doesn’t think he manages it before he’s out of the room and hurrying down to his car.

I don’t need to take care of myself, he thinks, falling into the seat behind the wheel. *I have an Alpha for that*.

***

The drive from the crime scene is long and it’s dark by the time Will arrives in Baltimore. Hannibal’s Bentley is the only car parked outside, though, so he lets himself straight into the office, already speaking before his Alpha has even looked up from writing patient notes at his desk.

‘It’s getting worse.’

Will jerks his coat from his shoulders and throws it onto the hook. Scrapes his hands through his hair and strides to the window, the couch, pacing back and forth as Hannibal closes the book and sets his pen aside.

Masking his surprise at his mate’s sudden appearance and obvious distress, Hannibal rises from his chair and moves around the desk to perch against it, clasping his hands before him to keep from reaching for the other man. He can tell, from the set of Will’s shoulders and the muscle jumping in his jaw, that his Omega doesn’t want to be touched right now.

‘Tell me what happened,’ he says, and Will looks over, hugging his elbows before shrugging helplessly.

‘I… had a hallucination,’ he admits. ‘I lost time… *Hours*… I…’ He sighs. Shakes his head. Stares at the ceiling, fighting tears. ‘I *contaminated* a crime scene.’ He drops his arms to his sides and starts pacing again. ‘I was fishing, and then I went home, I *showered*, I changed… I was gutting one of the trout and then… I was *killing* her…’ Chokes and ducks his head. ‘I still have the coppery smell of blood on my hands.’ He turns to Hannibal, his throat bobbing as he swallows down the whimpers clawing up to free themselves from his chest. ‘I can’t remember *seeing* the crime scene before I saw myself killing her.’

‘Those memories sank out of sight,’ Hannibal says, watching him carefully, his face betraying nothing. ‘Yet you’re aware of their absence.’

‘There’s a *grandiosity* to the violence that I imagined, that feels more real than what I know is true,’ Will says, pointing at him with both of his shaking hands to emphasize his point. His skin is shining with a thin coat of sweat, and Hannibal recognizes his sweater as being the softest one Will owns; the one he wears when his flesh is tender and stinging. A side effect of his near-constant prodrome.

‘What do you know to be true?’ he replies, and Will’s paces becomes shorter, more frantic. A caged animal, futilely searching for a way to slip through the bars of its prison.

‘I know I didn’t kill her,’ he says. ‘I- I couldn’t have, but I *remember* cutting into her. I *remember* watching her die.’

Hannibal releases a slow breath. *It will all be over soon*.

‘You *must* overcome these delusions that are disguising your reality,’ he says heavily, and Will sighs. Taps his hand against the rung of the ladder near him. Hannibal tilts his head. ‘What kind of savage delusions does this killer have?’ he asks, grounding Will in the violence. In the darkness.

But Will shakes his head and leans back against the ladder for support, his knees weak at the memory of it. His chest is a gaping hole and he can’t *think*. He can’t…

He swallows.

‘It wasn’t savage,’ he says quietly. ‘It was… *lonely*.’ Tears prick his eyes and he flicks them away. ‘It was desperate… *Sad*…’ He wets his lips, and Hannibal feels his chest tighten as Will continues, ‘I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror… And I looked right *through* me… *Past* me… As if I was… Was just a- a stranger.’ His voice catches and he has to stop because the tightness in his throat is too much. Too close to dissolving into tears and he doesn’t want that.

Hannibal pushes up from the desk and moves closer, crowding Will up against the ladder, pinning him with his scent and watching Will’s pulse jump in his throat.

‘You have to *honestly* confront your limitations with what you do,’ he says, dipping his head towards him. ‘And how it affects you.’

Will takes a shuddering breath, leaning back and baring his throat. *I’m yours*. He doesn’t *want* to fight his Alpha on this, but he can’t help but shake his head and speak to Hannibal’s shoulder he replies,

‘If, by *limitations*, you mean the difference between sanity and *insanity*, I don’t accept that.’

‘What *do* you accept?’ Hannibal asks, and Will’s brow furrows.

‘I know what kind of crazy I am,’ he says, his voice cracking with desperation. ‘And this isn’t *that* kind of crazy…’ He pleads with Hannibal, *begging* him with his eyes, dipping his head to bare the side of his throat because he *needs* his Alpha to *really* listen to him. To hear him. ‘This could be *seizures*, this could be… a tumor? A… a *blood clot*…? You said it

yourself; too long on heat suppressants can cause all *sorts* of neurological symptoms; what if it's the medication?'

Please… Please, Hannibal… Please let me check… Please… Don't make me do it behind your back…

Hannibal feels Will's panic, and he knows he will lose his trust if he continues to deny him medical testing.

'I can recommend an Omega Specialist,' he replies, and the relief on Will's face squeezes his heart in a fist of ice as he continues, '*But*, if it isn't physiological, then you *have* to accept what you're struggling with is mental illness.'

Will tries to nod but it's more of a head jerk, and he watches as Hannibal returns to his desk to find the contact details. His Alpha's mind is still mostly closed to him, and he can only sense a hint of worry from his mate, mingled with resignation; he can't read his thoughts. *Can he read all of mine, yet?*

Hannibal feels Will scratching at the carefully constructed walls protecting his thoughts, trying to pick the lock on his doors, but he won't allow him entry to his mind palace yet. Will is not ready; they still have a lot of work to do on his own shadow before he can meet Hannibal's true self.

'Would you like me to come with you to the appointment, Will?' he asks, glancing back at him as he dials the number for the healthcare center. A clever distraction, and one that works; Will swallows and nods, pushing away from the ladder and closing the distance between them. He hugs his Alpha from behind as Hannibal listens to the options on the phone, resting his head on Hannibal's shoulder when the taller man shifts and wraps an arm around him. Pliant and submissive; he's demonstrating his gratitude at Hannibal's acquiescence, and Hannibal smiles to himself as he toys with the idea of how *else* Will could *demonstrate* his appreciation.

Tucking himself up to his Alpha's side, Will lets himself relax as he listens to Hannibal's calm voice and clipped, enquiring words. He breathes in deep, savoring the other man's rich musk and cologne. Rubs his cheek against the silk of Hannibal's pocket square and loops his arms around his Alpha's waist, his heart fluttering and his stomach clenching up as Hannibal makes an appointment for them to see someone called Dr Sutcliffe tomorrow.

'Thank you,' he murmurs, nuzzling Hannibal's cheek as the Alpha hangs up. When Hannibal turns towards him, Will finds his lips and holds each side of his mate's face, drawing him in to deepen the kiss. He sucks Hannibal's tongue down, arching his back and pressing his chest up against him, sliding his fingers through Hannibal's silky hair. He feels Hannibal's strong hands on his hips, pulling their groins flush together, and moans into his Alpha's mouth, rocking against the answering hardness he can feel in Hannibal's trousers.

Devouring Will's mouth, Hannibal runs his hands over the soft jersey of Will's sweater, spreading his palms over his chest and then up each side of his throat, feeling the thundering pulse against his fingers. He pushes at the navy vest and Will shrugs his shoulders to help him get rid of it. They break the kiss for just long enough to yank the top up and over Will's

head, and then their lips meet again, brushing and sucking and nipping, sharing breath and spit as Will fumbles with the buttons of Hannibal's waistcoat.

Moaning at how *difficult* his Alpha's clothing is, Will abandons the suit in favor of pulling Hannibal's tie loose, but he doesn't get the chance to drop it before Hannibal has taken it from his hands and is turning him, walking him back towards the ladder and pinning him up against it again. His eyes fly open and heat floods him, making every inch of skin tingle when his Alpha takes his hands and puts them together, winding the silk tie around his wrists to bind him.

'Hannibal…'

Hannibal kisses him again, soothing him as he knots the tie. He nuzzles Will's cheek and bearded jaw, encouraging him to turn his head so that he can lick and suck at the sensitive flesh beneath his ear, and he purrs when Will whimpers, spreading his legs around Hannibal's thigh.

'Do you trust me, Will?' he whispers, lifting the Omega's arms above his head and pushing them against a higher rung. Will's heart skips a beat and his breath catches when he realizes what's happening; he glances up, hesitates, and then looks back at Hannibal. Looks into his dark eyes, his hungry face, and nods.

'Yes.'

'Tap twice if you need to stop,' Hannibal says quietly, and he waits until Will has swallowed and nodded his understanding before looping the ends of the tie around the rung, securing him there. He steps back, eyeing his prize, and watches as Will quivers, eyes bright with nervous desire. Gives him a predatory smile when Will's cheeks flush and his curls darken with sweat, and then slowly begins to remove his clothes.

Will can't stop himself from pulling against his restraint, testing Hannibal's knots, and excitement battles apprehension as he confirms that he *can't* get loose by himself. He takes a deep breath, parting his lips to taste Hannibal's scent on the roof of his mouth, and the air in front of his mouth shimmers as fire rolls up from his core. He twitches at the amount of slick that spills down his thighs, trembling when beads of sweat trickle down his back.

Hannibal takes his time getting undressed, carefully folding his suit jacket and waistcoat over the back of Will's armchair so that they don't crease. His burgundy eyes never leave Will's face, and he watches as Will's pupils widen, black swallowing blue, barely hemmed in by a ring of copper.

'How do you feel?' he murmurs, toeing off his shoes and socks before unzipping his trousers and pushing them down his legs. He steps out of them, adding them to the growing pile of clothes, and loops his thumbs into the waistband of his briefs, grinning at the way Will flexes his muscles and strains against his bonds.

Will whines, licking his lips at the idea of being the one to stroke Hannibal's lean chest, imagining running his fingertips across his nipples and then down, tracing the lines of his

stomach to his hips… He bucks forward, the seam of his trousers digging into his erection, and drops his head back to bare his throat.

'*Hard*,' he says, and huffs a laugh. Hannibal chuckles and comes closer, cupping Will through the fabric of his trousers and massaging him.

'Good,' he purrs, and he kisses him again, swallowing Will's whimper at the clink of his belt buckle coming undone. He slides the zipper down, torturously slowly, and Will moans again, reaching towards Hannibal as much as his tied arms allow, trying to encourage him to move faster, to get him naked *now* so that he can fuck him already. But Hannibal just grins, and keeps kissing him, over and over as he pushes Will's trousers down tensing thighs so that the Omega can step out of them. He kneels and removes Will's boots and socks, then licks and nibbles and kisses his way up Will's legs, striking sparks that fan the flames consuming him as Will shudders above him.

'*Fuck*… Hannibal…' Will closes his eyes, resting his head back against the ladder as his Alpha kisses over the bulge in his boxers. He can't keep his hips from jumping when Hannibal buries his nose into his throbbing erection to inhale his scent, and he gasps when Hannibal pins him, gripping his hips hard enough to leave fingerprints.

'I'm going to taste you, Will,' Hannibal says, sitting back on his heels to look up at his bound Omega. 'I want you to hold still.'

He peels Will's underwear off and rasps his tongue over the lines of Will's hips, kneading the firm muscles of his buttocks before gathering up some of the wetness and teasing at the very *edge* of the Omega's pulsing entrance. His mate smells *divine*; sweet, sugary slick overlaying smoky musk, and Hannibal's mouth waters as he kisses up the side of Will's twitching length.

Will's breath catches and he freezes in place, *acutely* aware of Hannibal's lips on him, closing around the tip before his tongue laps at the sensitive flesh. He can't stop the little mewls and gasping huffs as teeth scrape *so* lightly up and down the silky skin, his breath fast and shallow. Hannibal enfolds him in the warm wetness of his mouth, his groan at the taste and feel of him vibrating and adding to the sensation, and white fire licks across Will's pulsing crest. He can't stop the shudder that wracks him as Hannibal eases a finger inside him, and he pulls hard on the silk holding him up as his knees threaten to buckle.

'H-*Hannibal*…' he whispers, biting his lower lip because it feels *so* good, and he's so trapped, unable to do anything but *feel*…

Hannibal smiles and hums his praise as he feels Will clench around him, bearing down before pulling his finger in deeper. Slick wets his hand to the palm and he cups Will's balls with his left, tugging and rolling as he dips his head to work his mouth and throat around every *inch* of his Omega. Will is shaking now, trying *so* hard to hold still, to obey, his body opening up around a second finger and pulsating when Hannibal crooks the knuckle and pulls against *that* spot deep inside.

'Hannibal… *Hannibal*…' Will's close; he can feel it like a tidal wave inside him, drawing in with every suck and stroke. He flexes his fingers, sweat rolling down his chest, and, at Hannibal's nudge, he spreads his legs as far as they'll go. He can see himself in his Alpha's

eyes; wanton, beautiful and *owned*, giving up everything he has because Hannibal wants him to, and it tips him over the edge and he's *coming*, pulsing gold light filling him, flowing through him into Hannibal as he spills himself down the Alpha's throat and bears down around his fingers, squeezing over and over and over as if it's a knot. He hears himself cry out before his voice breaks off into a long groan and he sags, breathing hard as he fights the dark current rising up to claim him. '*Hannibal*…'

Humming in satisfaction, Hannibal wipes the overspill from the corner of his mouth and rises. Will is shaking from the orgasm, head back and throat beautifully bared, *begging* to be bitten. Hannibal pushes his own boxers down and kicks them to the side before reaching out and cupping the back of Will's head, pulling him in for a kiss that makes him strain against his bonds. Will keens into his lips, his deadened scent sharpening with heat hormones, and Hannibal brushes his thumb over Will's cheekbone before moving his hand back, finding his burning hot crest and squeezing.

He watches as Will's eyes fly open again, sightless and wide with innocent amazement at how *good* it feels. He loves seeing his Omega like this; lost to sensation, the most *primal* he will ever be without killing. Will bares his teeth at him and Hannibal snarls back, crushing their lips together in a bruising, bloody kiss. He shoves at Will's legs, hooking them up over his elbows so that his mate is suspended from the ground, unable to do *anything* about the fact that Hannibal is about to fuck him, and Will grips tight to the ladder rung, supporting himself as he nods.

'Hannibal… *Hannibal*…'

'Push out for me, Will,' Hannibal says, taking hold of himself, his breath hitching at the moment of resistance before he breaches the ring of muscle. And then he's in, sinking deep until his balls slap against Will's, and he has to wait for a moment because it's *so* hot and tight and *perfect*… And Will is making *all* the right noises, calling for him as only an Omega can, pitching his voice to encourage Hannibal to fuck him hard and fast, to *own* him; to reassert his claim of bonding and dominance again and again. Fill him with his seed and put a child in his belly.

'*Mine*,' Hannibal growls, rocking his hips in slow, deep thrusts, gripping Will's crest tight with one hand, holding his hip with the other.

Will wraps his legs tight around Hannibal's waist, moving in time with him, breathing hard with the effort of holding himself up but *achingly* aroused at the way it makes his muscles contract and pulls Hannibal's length in deeper with every rock.

'Yours,' he gasps, feeling the sting of the silk tie dig into his wrists as he lets go of the ladder but not caring because it's *so* good and he's *so* close again and all he cares about is Hannibal… Hannibal inside him, around him, Hannibal's hand on his crest, his breath on his face, his hand on his hip and his lips on his cheek as he pants into his jaw. 'Yours… I'm yours, I'm yours.'

'Come for me, Will,' Hannibal growls, and he sinks his teeth into the muscle of Will's chest as his own orgasm rips through him, thrusting up and up as he knots inside his Omega, sealing them together with his seed safe inside. He feels Will spasm around him, the

command coupled with a crest pinch and the smell and feel of Hannibal's release sending him spinning into a second, furious orgasm. He releases Will's crest to cup the side of his face as Will's brow furrows at the *sharpness* of the pleasure, and then he kisses him, slowly and tenderly, as he reaches up to undo the knots securing Will's bound hands to the ladder.

He hushes him when Will whimpers, and manages to carry him, without staggering, to the blue couch against the wall. Sits heavily, pulling Will to straddle his lap and kissing away his Omega's tears from the knot pulling at his tender body. Pushes sweat-damp curls back from Will's forehead and kisses his temples, his eyebrows and his nose as he gently unwinds the silk tie from Will's wrists.

'*Hannibal*…'

Will's floating in the current; waves lapping at the edge of his consciousness, and he can feel himself swaying as he watches, from the other side of the veil, as his Alpha kisses and licks the welts around his wrists. He falls against Hannibal's chest and snuggles against his shoulder, pressing burning lips to Hannibal's sweaty neck as his Alpha hugs him. Feels Hannibal's strong hands stroking up and down his back, calming him as he continues to tremble, and, when he hears the quiet instruction to let go, to sink into the darkness, he obeys without question.

Hannibal rests his cheek on the top of Will's head, listening to his heartrate return to normal as his Omega begins to purr, lost to prodrome. He'll need to convince Sutcliffe to conceal the truth about Will's condition, and taking him in for any kind of medical treatment is a risk, but a small part of him is relieved that Will was able to persuade him to give in. After all, he wants a *partner*, an *equal*, and Will's iron strength and innate stubbornness is one of the many things that attracted him in the first place.

It won't help you, he thinks, kissing Will's temple as he idly traces the bruises forming around his wrists. *But at least I'll know the extent of the damage I've done to you*.

***

Noble Hills Healthcare Center in Baltimore, Maryland, has an entire unit devoted to Omega medical care. When Will and Hannibal arrive, they follow the signs for the East Wing, a monstrosity of stereotypical 'Omegan' décor; all pastel colors and creams shot through with gold; presumably to remind them of their eye color and therefore calm them. Will notes the way Hannibal raises an eyebrow at him as they sit down on the plush chairs in the waiting area; sighs and pinches the bridge of his nose, fighting a snarl at how *cozy* everything is.

'Perhaps I should redecorate your house for you,' Hannibal teases, and Will snorts, giving him a twisted smile and an eye roll for understanding his unspoken rage. He links their fingers together when Hannibal reaches for him, studiously avoiding the magazines on the table in front of him, the most recent of which features the headline of 'Crest stacking: the latest trends in Omegan nuchal piercing'.

If he wasn't feeling so nervous, the sight of Hannibal, in his smart coat, sharp suit and polished shoes reading an article about 'The joy of nest-making' from *Omega Weekly* would

have made him laugh, but as it is, Will can't do more than snort as he taps his hands together, his knee bouncing as he waits for his name to be called. God; he *hates* this place.

'Will Graham?'

He's standing before the receptionist has finished speaking, and takes a step forwards as Hannibal sets the magazine down to follow. The receptionist smiles at him and gestures to the door behind her.

'Dr Sutcliffe will see you now,' she says, and sits back down when Hannibal knocks on the polished wood.

Dr Sutcliffe is an Alpha, but significantly less intimidating than Hannibal, and he smiles warmly when he opens the door to greet them. He offsets his tanned skin with a light blue shirt, and his sandy beard and receding hair is lightened with blond where he's caught the sun from a recent holiday. Clearly, being an Omega Specialist pays well.

'Good morning, come on in,' he says, stepping back and gesturing for them to enter his office. 'Got to say, I was surprised to see his name on the referral, but know that you're in good hands. Dr Lecter here is one of the sanest men I know.'

'I would agree,' Hannibal replies, smiling when Sutcliffe squeezes his arm in greeting. 'Dr Sutcliffe and I were residents together at Hopkins,' he says to Will, removing his coat as he speaks.

'Another life ago,' Sutcliffe jokes, taking his seat behind the desk. 'Back when you weren't afraid to get your hands a little dirty.'

'I was always drawn to how the mind works,' Hannibal says, draping his coat over the back of his seat before sitting and crossing one leg over the other. 'I found it *much* more dynamic than how the brain works, *no* matter the caste.'

'The projected image is more interesting than the projector,' Sutcliffe replies, nodding to show his understanding of his friend's decision. 'Until, of course, the projector breaks down.'

In this analogy, I'm the projector, Will thinks. *And I'm broken.*

He doesn't remove his coat when he sits; he's wearing layers today; a sweater over his shirt, buttoned high, and his glasses, but Hannibal is kind enough not to comment on his defensive behavior.

Sutcliffe turns to him and smiles gently.

'So, Will… these headaches? When did they begin in earnest?'

Will glances at him, his brow creased. He tries to make himself look at Sutcliffe's face, but his gaze flickers back and forth to his shoulder. The Alpha is in his element now, and his blue eyes are piercing.

‘Two to three months ago,’ he says, unconsciously glancing at Hannibal for confirmation. His Alpha nods.

‘About the time Will went back into the field, which is when I met him,’ he adds.

Sutcliffe nods thoughtfully, leaning back in his chair, welcoming honesty from Will, swiveling to face him and give him his full attention. Showing him that he matters, even if he *is* bonded.

‘And the hallucinations?’ he asks.

Will’s frown deepens as he considers his answer.

‘I can’t really say when they started,’ he says carefully, ignoring the tightness in his chest; the lump in his throat. ‘Um… I just slowly became aware that I might not be dreaming.’

Sutcliffe frowns, and gives Hannibal a sharp look, which he returns calmly. *Yes, I allowed it.*

‘Sounds like you have quite an active imagination,’ the Sutcliffe says lightly, focusing on Will again. ‘When was your last heat?’

Will looks at his lap. Swallows hard.

‘Er… Five years ago,’ he says quietly.

‘Five *years*?’ Sutcliffe yelps, and Will shrinks back into the chair, fighting the urge to whine. Hannibal clears his throat and subtly adjusts his body language, turning his chest more towards Will to comfort him.

‘I am fully aware of Will’s situation,’ he says firmly, and Sutcliffe purses his lips. ‘Will knows the risks, *and* he understands that he *must* experience his next heat. He was managing his own medication for a while, but he is under my care now, as both my patient and my mate.’

Will scowls at his lap, twisting his hands together. Glances up in time to see Sutcliffe give Hannibal another disapproving look, and his darkness rises up in a wave that makes him want to snarl at the other Alpha.

‘Dr Lecter doesn’t try to control my biology,’ he growls. ‘He respects me enough to accept my decision to postpone my estrus cycle.’

‘Be that as it may,’ Sutcliffe says, a note of warning in his tone, ‘the complications that can arise from an excessively delayed heat cycle are astronomical, *especially* in male Omegas. When do you normally go into heat?’

Will huffs and shrugs.

‘I don’t know; September, maybe October time? It’s never been that regular.’

‘Do you regularly miss heats because of suppressants?’ Sutcliffe asks, sighing through his nose when Will nods. He makes a note on the form in front of him, and then gestures to them both. ‘And you’ve been bonded to Dr Lecter for how long?’ he asks, prompting a blush from Will and an answering smile from Hannibal.

‘Er, about two weeks,’ Will says quietly.

Sutcliffe’s eyebrows climb up to his hairline.

‘And your previous Alpha? What did they think of your, er, *irregular* heat cycles?’

Will shakes his head, but his voice fails him and it’s Hannibal who responds.

‘This is Will’s first pair bond.’

‘I *see*…’ Sutcliffe sighs and scratches his beard. ‘Well… I must say, this is very concerning, Mr Graham. The first thing I want to do is run a full blood panel and get you in for an MRI. We need to see what’s going on in that body of yours.’

Wil’s breath catches, and he grips tight to the armrest because he *wants* to reach for Hannibal’s hand, but he won’t let himself.

‘I assume you’ll be checking liver function and for swelling in the brain with the MRI,’ Hannibal says, giving voice to the questions trapped in Will’s head. He reaches out, his palm up, and Will grabs for him, squeezing tight because Hannibal knows *just* what he needs.

‘Exactly,’ Sutcliffe says. ‘Bloods should give us a reading of your hormone levels and give us an indication of when you’re due your next heat.’ He gives Will a hard look, his eyes narrowed, and adds, ‘You’re aware that, when you finally *do* experience a heat, it’s likely to be difficult, having been on blockers for so long? You might experience two consecutively, or one intermittently… There may be other complications as well, which Dr Lecter here will need to monitor. And, of course, you’re unlikely to become pregnant.’

Will grits his teeth and looks away from them both, refusing to acknowledge the assumption that, as a bonded Omega, he’ll *obviously* want to bear children as soon as possible.

‘We’re acutely aware,’ Hannibal replies, giving Will’s hand another squeeze. ‘No expectations.’

Will can’t help but narrow his eyes at him; he can *feel* Hannibal’s amusement at his anger and he yanks his hand back from his Alpha.

Fuck you.

‘Let’s get a nurse to take you down to the Assessment Unit,’ Sutcliffe continues, lifting his phone as he speaks. ‘And we can get started.’

***

Everything in the Omega Assessment Unit is warm and *gentle*, and Will hates that he *likes* the feel of the soft gown against his sensitive skin. He turns down the offer of numbing gel before his blood is taken, sickness curling in his stomach when the Beta nurse pats his hand and tells him he has nothing to worry about, that it'll only hurt a little and that his Alpha is right there.

And Hannibal just *smirks* like a fucking Cheshire cat as Will glares at him, watching carefully as his Omega's blood flows into three test tubes for analysis. He eyes the room with carefully hidden disdain, noting the lack of posters and healthcare advice leaflets. There is nothing here that could upset or distress the Omegas; it is assumed that such *difficult* information would be given to the Alpha only. Only floral paintings and pleasant scenes… All childlike naivety and subliminal messaging to remain passive.

'There we go,' the nurse coos, taping a wad of cotton wool to the crook of Will's elbow as she withdraws the needle. 'How are you feeling?'

'Fine,' Will mutters, looking away and bending his arm up, flexing his fist to prove that having a bit of blood drawn is no big deal, even for a *delicate* little Omega.

'I'll be back in a minute to take you through to the MRI,' the nurse says, jotting Will's details onto the labels and then smiling at him again. Will represses the urge to bare his teeth at her, but barely, and he rolls his eyes at Hannibal as soon as they're alone.

'This is ridiculous,' he grumbles, sitting forwards in the padded chair, his feet dangling up off the floor because the nurse forgot to lower it. He leans forwards and rests his head on Hannibal's chest when his Alpha comes to stand in front of him, breathing in the smell of cedarwood, cloves and musk to soothe his frayed nerves.

'I must admit, I hadn't realized how patronizing the world can be to an Omega,' Hannibal murmurs, and Will hums, looking up at him with a sad smile. Hannibal frees one hand from under the coat draped over his arm and cups the side of his mate's face, stroking his jaw with his thumb before dipping his head to kiss him.

Will moans at the feel and taste of him, grabbing a handful of Hannibal's suit in both hands. Before he can get carried away and embarrass himself in the thin gown, Hannibal is pushing him back and resting their foreheads together.

'Later,' his Alpha purrs, and Will twitches at the promise. He clears his throat and smooths out Hannibal's jacket just as the nurse comes back in, jumping down before she can fiddle with the bed. She looks surprised at his daring, but doesn't comment on it because Hannibal quirks an eyebrow at her.

'If you'll follow me,' she says, and leads them down the corridor to the MRI suite.

Hannibal stays a step behind Will, ostensibly to shield his Omega from prying eyes, but *thoroughly* enjoying the uninhibited view of Will's backside moving in the silk boxers he's been provided. Dr Sutcliffe greets them at the door, and the two Alphas go into the monitor room to the right whilst the nurse takes Will into the scanner room through the double doors.

‘Don’t you worry,’ she says kindly, holding out a plastic case with two earplugs in. ‘Your Alpha will be *just* outside, and it’ll be over before you know it.’

Will hums, too distracted to notice the condescension because this is it; if the scan doesn’t show anything, then Hannibal’s right – it’s mental illness, and that’s *much* scarier than anything physical.

He slots the silicone plugs into his ears and gets up onto the table, adjusting the gown before lying down. Takes a deep breath as he slots his head into the rest, trying to ignore his fluttering heart.

Please find something… Please let them find something…

He wonders how many times patients have lain here and thought the opposite.

In the monitor room, behind tinted glass, Hannibal feels an echo of Will’s nerves.

‘It’s prodrome,’ he says quietly. ‘Causing swelling in the right hemisphere of his brain.’

Sutcliffe glances up from his notes, giving Hannibal the same quizzical frown he’d worn *many times* at Hopkins.

‘That’s your pre-diagnosis?’ he teases and Hannibal nods, deadly serious.

‘Yes.’

‘Based on…?’

‘Nuchal manipulation combined with light therapy and estrogen injections,’ Hannibal replies. ‘The inflammation is no doubt caused by the rapid detox of suppressants.’

Sutcliffe gapes at him. At the casual tone with which he talks about *manipulating* his Omega’s biology.

‘Okay… Can I ask *why* you’re doing that to him?’

Hannibal lifts one shoulder in a delicate shrug.

‘I, too, had my concerns about the length of time between Will’s heat cycles. About the possibility of organ damage. I wanted him to stop as soon as possible. Your blood tests will show that he’s due his heat any day now.’

Sutcliffe nods carefully, but he can’t keep from crossing his arms as he asks,

‘If you knew what was wrong with him, why didn’t you say something?’

Hannibal watches as the nurse raises the scanner bed and slides Will inside the machine.

‘I don’t want him to know,’ he says. ‘Will is *very* against experiencing heat. But I have to be sure as to the inflammation. His symptoms began slowly and gradually worsened, and,

yesterday, I asked him to draw a clock.'

He withdraws his notebook as he speaks and opens it to show Sutcliffe.

'This is what he drew.'

The Omega Specialist puts his glasses on and nods down at the lopsided scrawl.

'Huh… Spatial neglect…' Pulls them off again and taps the rim on his other hand. 'Headaches, disorientation, hallucinations, altered consciousness… It's all the tell-tale signs… His heat should fix it…'

Hannibal nods, his dark eyes gleaming.

'It's so rare to be able to study the psychological effect of Prodromal Phasing on an Omega's mind,' he says, deliberately thoughtful. And Sutcliffe, being Sutcliffe, bites.

'It's more rare, still, to be able to study the *neurological* effects,' he agrees.

'A doctor has to weigh the ultimate benefit of scientific study,' Hannibal says, and he knows he's got him. 'Even in these times, we know *so* little about Omega prodrome, and its effect on their brain.' He looks at Sutcliffe, and his fellow Alpha looks back at him. 'There are great discoveries to be made.'

Sliding into the scanner is like slipping into a warm bath, and Will can feel the dark current swallow him. He's under the bed, staring at the slats, *waiting*… Waiting for the Alpha to come back…

The MRI whirs and hums around him. Starts to bang, and his heart thumps with it, battering his ribcage and sending his temperature soaring.

She's coming… Creeping closer, her flashlight beam lighting up the floor…

You're not my Alpha.

He grabs her ankle. Hauls her towards him and she screams.

He turns his head, or maybe he just *thinks* he does… And she's *there*… Her face split in two, teeth on display… The sliced muscles of her cheeks glistening pink…

'He doesn't *smell* like he's approaching heat,' Sutcliffe says, looking out through the mirrored glass to where Will is lying in the scanner, waiting to hear if it's his mind or his body that's seriously ill.

'Scent suppressants,' Hannibal replies, his eyes flicking to the screen where the images are starting to come through. 'He was taking more than a recommended dose of estrus blockers before; now, he takes pheromone blockers, and no one is any the wiser.'

'And his eyes? Prodromal Phasing typically presents with gold irises,' Sutcliffe says. 'I noticed his are still blue.'

Hannibal smiles, and withdraws a spare bottle of Inhibitor drops from his breast pocket. Sutcliffe takes with a smile and a shake of his head.

‘I must say, your dedication to your field of study is… *impressive*,’ he says, handing the bottle back. He sits down and points to the first scan. ‘There; you’re spot on. Right side of his brain is completely inflamed. It’s a rare complication of Prodromal Phasing… Until his heat hits, his symptoms are only going to get worse.’

‘I know,’ Hannibal says, memorizing the pattern of swelling in his mate’s brain. ‘It’s unfortunate for Will.’

Sutcliffe looks at him with a mixture of amazement and nervousness.

‘What do you have planned for *me*?’ he asks, and Hannibal curls his lips into a hungry smile.

‘Opportunity.’

***

‘We didn’t find anything abnormal,’ Sutcliffe says, and the words stab at Will like a knife. He stares at the brain scans on the screen, at the perfectly healthy blue and green patterns of a neutral Omega brain, and he can feel something tearing inside, something *breaking* as the last of his hope fades.

‘No vascular malformations, no tumors, no swelling or bleeding,’ Sutcliffe continues, his voice battering into Will until he feels bruised. ‘No evidence of stroke…’ The Omega Specialist is sat in his chair, reading from the pages before him. ‘Liver and kidneys are functioning as normal… There’s n*othing* wrong with you, physically.’

Will holds very still, his throat closed tight around the urge to whimper. To keen for his Alpha. Hannibal is standing just behind him, but Will can’t tell what he’s thinking or feeling. It’s making it difficult to control his fear. Makes him want to *cry*…

Pathetic. Weak. Crazy.

He forces himself to swallow, to look at Dr Sutcliffe.

‘So… what I’m experiencing is… psychological?’ he asks quietly, his voice trembling. Sutcliffe glances at Hannibal and then sighs. Looks away as he replies,

‘Well, brain and body scans *can’t* diagnose, er, *mental* disorders… They can only rule out medical illnesses, like a *tumor*, which can have similar symptoms.’

Will is very quiet, staring off to the side, his shoulders bowed as fine tremors wrack him. Sutcliffe’s stomach clenches at the *pain* on the Omega’s face and he can’t help but add,

‘Look, we’ll run some more tests. We’ll take some more blood samples…’ He puts Will’s folder down on the side and notices Hannibal looking at him, one eyebrow slightly raised. Sutcliffe swallows and finishes heavily, ‘… But, I imagine they’ll prove *just* as inconclusive.’

Will nods, his throat bobbing around the lump threatening to dissolve into tears, and Hannibal steps closer. Rests a hand on his shoulder and dips his head down to kiss his cheek.

‘Let me take you home,’ he murmurs, and Will nods again. Takes his coat when his Alpha hands it to him and pulls it on with numb hands, not even noticing the hospital décor as he follows Hannibal out of the Omega Unit and back to the Bentley parked outside.

‘Talk to me, Will,’ Hannibal says, catching his mate’s hand when they get outside and pulling him to a stop. ‘Tell me how you feel.’

Will tries to jerk away, ducking his face so that Hannibal can’t see the tears welling in his eyes, and growls at him when the Alpha pulls him closer, trying to lift his chin.

‘*Not* here!’ he snarls, shoving at Hannibal and stumbling down the curb to the passenger door. He gives the handle a pointed tug and Hannibal sighs, his breath steaming the cold air. Unlocks the car and watches as Will falls into the seat, pushing his glasses off as he scrubs at his face.

Will’s brain is spinning. He can’t *breathe*. He can’t… He can’t *do* this…

I was so sure… I was so certain it was something physical…

‘You need to accept this news, Will,’ Hannibal says, climbing behind the wheel and turning to his mate. ‘Fighting the truth will only make it harder. More painful.’

‘I know,’ Will mutters, staring at his bouncing knee. ‘Can… Can you just drive, please? I want to be alone for a while.’

‘Of course,’ Hannibal says, his face schooled to neutral as he starts the engine. He’d anticipated Will’s need for solitude after such bad news; counted on it, in fact, since the isolation will widen the cracks in his psyche further, but he hadn’t expected it to hurt as much as it does.

This isn’t about me, he reminds himself, driving through Baltimore, onto the interstate and then out towards Wolf Trap. *This is for Will. To help him*.

I’m going to free you, Will. Hold on just a little longer.

***

Sipping brandy before a crackling fire with Jack Crawford in his office that evening, Hannibal sets the next phase of his plan into motion.

‘You knew, from the moment you walked into his classroom, that you were putting Will in a potentially destructive environment,’ he says, allowing a little of his disapproval to color his tone. As anticipated, the other Alpha responds defensively to this.

‘I had *eight* college girls dead in Minnesota,’ he replies. ‘Will caught their killer for me.’

‘He also caught their killer’s disease,’ Hannibal says, and Jack frowns at the fire when Hannibal continues, ‘He can’t stop thinking about what it is to take a life.’

‘Well, I’d rather *he* go a little mad than other innocents lose their lives,’ Jack snaps. ‘And I think he would feel the same way.’

Hannibal sighs, controlling the urge to snarl at the ignorant Alpha.

‘Will is an innocent,’ he reminds him, and Jack sighs. Tilts his head and shrugs because he knows it’s true. As an Omega, he is pure.

‘Yes, he is,’ he says heavily. Shrugs again. ‘I mean, Will is genuine.’ His eyes light with a desperate fire. ‘He’ll survive *anything* I could put him through. He will *always* fight his way back to himself.’

‘Not always,’ Hannibal replies, and raises an eyebrow at him. ‘So far.’

Jack huffs and rolls his eyes. Consoles himself with more brandy and Hannibal has to crush the urge to smash it into his smug, over-confident face.

You could never protect my mate.

‘He saw an Omega Specialist today,’ he continues. ‘They found nothing wrong with him. He was… very upset by that.’

‘You’re saying he *wanted* something to be wrong?’ Jack asks, frowning at him in confusion. Hannibal allows a little of his grief to color his eyes red.

‘I think he wanted an answer that wasn’t mental illness,’ he says sadly, and watches as Jack tenses.

‘You think he’s mentally ill.’ It isn’t a question, but Hannibal replies as if it is.

‘The *problem* Will has is too many mirror neurons,’ he explains. ‘Our heads are filled with them when we are children, Omegas even more so. It’s supposed to help us socialize and then melt away. Omegas are known for having more than Alphas and Betas, but Will held on to *all* of his, which makes knowing who he is a challenge.’

Jack listens pensively, lips tight and brow furrowed. Hannibal shifts, leaning closer to the other Alpha, his dark eyes locked on to Jack’s face as he pushes the word deep inside his mind.

‘All Omegas are known for their empathy, Jack; they can sense *vibrations* and memories in a place. When you take him to a crime scene, the very air has screams smeared on it. In those places, he doesn’t just reflect. He absorbs.’

***

He’s not sure *why* he needs to go back, but after feeding the dogs that night, Will finds himself in the car, driving back out through the snow to Beth LeBeau’s house. Back to the

crime scene.

He parks up and switches on his flashlight as he climbs out of the car. Uses his key to cut through the police tape over the front door and lets himself inside.

The house is cold and quiet. There's a funny smell; like death and fear… *Why are you afraid?*

Wood creaks under his feet as he heads upstairs, and Will moves carefully, following the beam of his flashlight. Tries to follow the resonances but they're weak… Not faded, just… Indistinct.

He flicks the light switch on the wall in the bedroom but it's not working. Gazes around the room, at the dresser with the model horses on top, at the rocking chair with a soft cushion and throw… Across the bloodstain on the floor, dark red against the harsh white of his flashlight, smeared from where *he* stepped in it… Where he *did* it…

Panic claws at his throat and Will feels his shirt stick to his back as heat rolls through him. He tucks his flashlight under his armpit and checks his watch. *A handle to hold onto*...

'It's 10.36. I'm in Greenwood, Delaware…' He looks around the room again, from the net curtains at the window to the side table, onto the bed… 'My name is Will Graham.'

And then, as the beam of light drops to the leg of the bed, he sees a face, bruised and distorted, with two amber eyes staring out at him. Will's throat closes up and his heart flips behind his ribs. His thoughts clamber on top of each other, realization jolting him like lightning.

What the fuck? That's an Omega… That's the killer… But… That's an Omega…

He starts to lean down, to check that he's not hallucinating, and the Omega withdraws with a whimper. Then, in a surprising show of strength, she shoves up from underneath the bed, flipping the heavy double mattress down on top of him as she bolts for the door.

Will brings his arm up, the torch beam swinging wildly, and staggers back, twisting in time to grab the Omega's arm as she runs past. There's a sickening tug and an entire strip of dead skin comes away, stinking of rotting flesh, and Will gags, stumbling as black and gold sparks swarm behind his eyes. His vision doubles and then caves in on itself. He gasps for breath, fire roaring up from the pit of his stomach. The current snags his legs and his shadow races through him as the sweet, sugary smell of his own slick rises from between his legs.

Hannibal...

He's…

Will gasps, jolted back to reality as snow crunches under his feet. He's… Where *is* he? He's outside… It's cold…

Steam curls from his sweaty skin, billowing in front of his face when he gasps for breath. His heart is thundering in his chest… Not pounding just… Strong. *So* strong…

He turns a circle, trying to get his bearings. The woods look familiar… He's not gone far… He can still smell the rotting scent of the Omega…

Grabbing his watch, Will whimpers as he reads the time. He's lost *hours*…

A handle…

His voice catches when he speaks, and he can't stop the shivers wracking him.

'It's 1.17am,' he manages, still turning, still looking for the killer. For the Omega. 'W-we're in G-Greenwood… Delaware…' *At least, I think we are… I hope we are…* 'And my name is Will Graham.'

And then, because he knows, he *knows* what she fears, he raises his voice to shout,

'And you're alive! If you can hear me… You're alive!'

***

It's a trek back to the house, but once he's there, Will calls Beverly Katz. She answers on the second ring and, when he says he thinks he encountered the killer at the crime scene, she comes straight over, arriving within the hour.

She looks tired, and she smells of her bed; her Omega's sweet musk is all over her skin, and Will feels a pang of guilt at having dragged her away from her mate for *this*.

'I'm sorry it's so late,' he says, leading her upstairs, retracing his steps as though he can remind himself of everything he's forgotten simply by *being* there again. He huffs. 'Or *early*, I suppose.'

'That's okay,' Beverly says, following carefully, her hands in the pockets of her leather jacket. 'Just… Why did you call me? Why not Jack? Why not the police?'

Embarrassment coils like a snake in his stomach, but Will wants to be honest with her. He can trust her with it.

'I called you because…I'm not *entirely* sure what I saw was real.'

He offers her a twisted smile, fiddles with the flashlight and returns to staring at the bed as Beverly sighs, putting a hand on her hip. She considers him for a moment and he wonders if she'll tell him *she* thinks he's crazy, too, before her expression softens.

'Then let's prove it,' she says simply. She *wants* to believe the best in him, and she'll do whatever she can to help him.

'I grabbed her arm,' Will says, turning and miming the action as he recalls the event. 'And an entire layer of dead skin separated from the underlying tissue, like… like she was wearing a glove.'

Beverly nods, no disgust or horror showing on her face, which Will appreciates.

‘That’s why she doesn’t bleed,’ she says thoughtfully, and Will hums.

‘Right; there’s no circulation. Nothing *alive* in the tissue to bind it.’

‘What did you do with it?’ Beverly asks, and Will frowns, trying to remember past the heat that had swallowed him whole.

‘… I don’t know,’ he replies, shrugging helplessly.

‘You can’t *remember*?’ Beverly asks, worry and disappointment warring on her face. She sighs and turns away, shaking her head as she thinks out loud. ‘Could be a staphylococcal infection… That or leprosy…’

‘The gold of her eyes was discolored,’ Will says, pacing back and forth as heat crackles up his spine. He’s been here too long; he needs to go home… to Hannibal. But he *can’t*… He’s sleeping alone tonight *and* tomorrow… He concentrates on the case again. Distracting himself from the emptiness in his chest. ‘She was malnourished… Jaundiced. Her liver was shutting down… She was… *deranged*.’

‘So, she *mutilated* an Alpha’s face because she thought it was a *mask*,’ Beverly says slowly, trying to understand the Omega’s motivation. Something clicks in Will’s mind and he takes a deep breath of realization.

‘She can’t see *faces*,’ he explains. He sighs. ‘If she *did* kill Beth LeBeau, she might not even know she did it.’

‘Then why did she come back?’ Beverly asks, looking around the room.

‘To convince herself she *didn’t*,’ Will suggests, grimacing again. Beverly tilts her head at him.

‘Is that why *you* came back?’ she asks, but the softness in her tone doesn’t stop his shadow from rearing up inside him, propelling Will to advance on her with a growl.

‘If I wasn’t *clear* on that issue, I *know* I didn’t kill Beth LeBeau,’ he says dangerously. Then, when Beverly doesn’t back down, just subtly squares her shoulders to remind him who the Alpha is between them, Will relents. ‘I just wanna know who *did*,’ he says quietly.

Beverly looks him up and down, a moment of hardness in her face, and then she nods.

‘Me too.’

‘Yeah…’ Will releases a slow breath, willing himself to calm down, to *cool* down, and ducks his head. His skin is crawling from standing up to Beverly, from challenging her like that. He’s *exhausted* and his whole *body* hurts…

Beverly considers him again, her dark eyes gleaming.

‘You’re the subject of a lot of speculation at the Bureau,’ she says.

‘Oh yeah?’ Will replies, trying for casual dismissal of gossip instead of panic, betrayed by the quiver in his voice. *Do they know? Do they know what I am?* ‘What are they speculating?’

‘That Jack pushed you right up to the edge, and now you’re pushing yourself over,’ Beverly says, looking him right in the eye as she speaks.

Will doesn’t know how what to say to that. He pauses, looking for the right words, and then swallows.

‘This killer… can’t accept her reality,’ he mutters. Winces and shrugs. ‘I can occasionally identify with that.’ He looks up at the damp patch on the ceiling, at the wallpaper… The *shimmer* in the air when he breathes out. ‘*That* said,’ he continues, ‘I feel… *relatively* sane.’

He turns and begins to walk away, taking his time, feeling the pulse of heat deep inside him, the trickle of slick down his thighs and the throb of his crest on the back of his neck.

‘We should go,’ he murmurs, speaking over his shoulder to Beverly, who hasn’t yet made a move to follow him. ‘Get some rest before work. Thanks for, er, *indulging* me, though.’

‘Of course,’ the Alpha says. ‘And Will?’

‘Hm?’ Out on the landing, Will pauses to look back at her. ‘Yeah?’

Beverly sighs, noting the defensive hunch of his shoulders, the closed and guarded expression on his face. Shrugs and shakes her head.

‘Just… Don’t go over the edge, okay? It’s not worth it.’

Will looks at her, at the concern in her red-tinged eyes, and feels a flicker of something in his chest. Something warm; different from the heat melting his bones… *Gratitude*. Because she cares, without knowing that he’s an Omega she’s *biologically* designed to protect. She cares about him as a *person*.

But she doesn’t know that he doesn’t have a *choice* in the matter… That the ground he’s standing on is sloped and loose… That the pit is yawning, endless black and warm, as welcoming as the grave…

But he likes her, so he nods. Offers her a shaky smile to accompany the lie.

‘Both feet firmly on solid earth. I’m not going anywhere.’

***

The rasp of Hannibal’s ballpoint pen on the thick paper of his notebook hurts Will’s ears. All his senses seem heightened; he’s wearing another soft jumper, cut low at the neck so it doesn’t touch his crest, and he hasn’t sprayed himself with any Beta pheromones because he can’t stomach the smell of them today.

It’s a relief to be in his Alpha’s office, away from the noise and stench of the world, from all the emotions battering him. This room has become one of his sanctuaries, and he can’t

remember a time when he didn't feel safe here.

Sat at the big desk, he jots down the numbers of the clock face as he speaks.

'It's 7.05pm. I'm in Baltimore, Maryland. My name is Will Graham.'

'Thank you for humoring me,' Hannibal says, tidying up as Will performs the so-called "grounding" exercise. He picks up a couple of textbooks and places them beside him as his Omega turns the notebook and holds it out for him, schooling his expression to neutral when he sees the disjointed circle, lines and numbers tumbling off the edge of the page.

Will sits back in the chair, the leather still clinging to faint remnants of Hannibal's scent and aftershave, releasing it around him with the movement. He places his hands on the armrests, open and relaxed. As worried as he is, he can't keep hold of the tension when he's with his Alpha. It just… melts away, because he knows he's protected. He can let go of everything and be completely honest.

'I feel like I'm seeing a ghost,' he murmurs, and Hannibal glances down at him from inspecting the clock.

'Regarding this killer, or yourself?' he asks, and Will raises his eyebrows.

'Both.'

'Well, she's real,' Hannibal replies. 'You *know* she's real. There's evidence.' He removes his pen and closes the notebook, securing it with its elastic band as he speaks. 'When you found her, your sanity did not leave you.'

'Time did,' Will points out, rolling his head back to watch his Alpha move. Hannibal looks down at him, a sadness lingering in his gaze.

'You lost time again?'

Will closes his eyes, nodding almost imperceptibly as his lips curve into a tiny, bitter smile. Hannibal moves again, slipping one hand into his pocket, the other fiddling with items on his desk as he continues,

'I spoke to Dr Sutcliffe. We briefly discussed the particulars of your visit. Would you like to discuss them with me?'

Will scoffs.

'There *are* no "particulars",' he replies. 'He didn't find anything wrong.'

'Then we keep looking for answers,' Hannibal says, withdrawing his scalpel and pencils from beneath his sketchbook. 'Perhaps you would permit me to run some tests of my own.'

A thrill of fear, tainted with bitter resignation, settles like a razor on the back of his neck, and Will rubs a hand over his mouth and jaw, feeling the rasp of beard beneath his fingers. He'd

always admired Hannibal's restraint when it came to studying him and his *empathy disorder*; seems the Alpha may just have been playing the long game.

'You wouldn't *publish* anything about me, would you, Dr Lecter?'

Hannibal pauses, and glances at Will as he replies,

'If there were ever anything that might be of therapeutic value to others, I'd abstract it in a form that would be totally unrecognizable.'

Will watches him, a thumb still balanced on his lower lip as if not sure whether to chew the nail or not, and then he sighs and turns away, *more* than done with this conversation. It makes him feel dirty.

'Just do me a favor and publish it *posthumously*,' he says, staring over at the far side of the room.

'After your death or mine?' Hannibal asks, not looking up from straightening his pencils.

'Whichever comes first,' Will replies, swiveling back to face his Alpha. He's never seen Hannibal so tense; never seen him fiddle so much. It makes him feel guilty, because he knows it's his condition, his illness, causing Hannibal's distress. The thought almost makes him huff a laugh, though the sound shrivels and dies before it even reaches his throat, and his expression remains fixed in a sad, pensive stare.

You're not the only one with a protective instinct, Alpha.

'Have you considered Cotard's syndrome?' Hannibal asks, and Will looks up, curious. 'It's a rare delusional disorder, in which a person believes he or she is dead,' the Alpha explains, still obsessively tidying his desk.

Will snorts.

'Are you talking about the killer, or me?'

'The killer, of course,' Hannibal replies.

'Of course,' Will says bitterly. He sits forward, squinting through the pain of another headache as he tries to concentrate through the hot sludge in his brain. Why is this so difficult? 'Um… She couldn't *see* the victim's face. *Or* she was trying to uncover it.'

Hannibal, now checking the notebook in which Will drew his clock face, speaks down to the blank pages.

'The inability to identify others is associated with Cotard's. It's a misfiring in the areas of the brain which recognize faces, and also in the amygdala, which adds emotion to those recognitions. It's more common in Omegas than anyone else.' He leans forward, resting his hands on the desk, and looks right into Will's eyes. 'Even those closest to her would seem like imposters.'

‘So… she reached out to someone she loved, someone she trusted… Felt betrayed… Became violent…’ Will’s heart sinks and his eyes sting with tears at the pain of it *understanding.* ‘Her *Alpha*. God… They were bonded… She went *home*…’

‘She can’t trust anything, or *anyone* she once knew to be trustworthy,’ Hannibal says heavily. ‘Not even her own mate.’ He looks sad as he adds, ‘Her mental illness won’t let her.’

Will stares up at him, his brows drawing together as fear tickles behind his ribcage. His shadow writhes, sliding through the cracks and filling him with darkness, smothering him until the air grows thin.

‘I trust *you*,’ he says, reaching across the desk for Hannibal’s hands. But his Alpha withdraws before he can touch, resuming his meticulous neatening.

‘For now,’ Hannibal says quietly, the sound of it tearing something inside Will, forcing him to stand, to make his way around the desk and duck his head to try to look at Hannibal’s downcast face.

‘*Always*,’ he promises, reaching for him again and taking hold of Hannibal’s right hand with both of his own. Hears his Alpha sigh and has to swallow down a whimper. He needs to be strong for his mate right now. Hannibal’s always strong for him; now it’s his turn. ‘You said it yourself; we’re going to keep looking for answers, right?’

Hannibal hums, but he looks away, his back rigid, and Will can feel the distance between them and he hates it. Hates how *fragile* it makes him feel.

He steps closer, pulling Hannibal’s arm around his waist so that his Alpha can rest his hand on the small of his back. Reaches up to cup Hannibal’s face, stroking a high cheekbone and the creases in the corner of his eye.

‘I want you to do something for me,’ he says, and swallows down his apprehension when Hannibal glances at him, curious. ‘I want you to hurt me.’ He presses a finger to Hannibal’s lips when the other man starts to protest. ‘No. Listen. You need to. You need to take control and I *trust* you. You know me better than *anyone*. You’re *inside* my *head*, all the time.’

‘Will –’

‘*Hannibal*.’ Will nudges him, encouraging Hannibal to lean back against the desk and so that Will can straddle his thigh. ‘You’ll never say it to me, but I *know* a part of you *likes* seeing me in pain.’ He smiles at the spark in his Alpha’s eyes, the surprise and *pride* at how *clever* his Omega is. Dips his head and looks up at Hannibal from under deliberately coy eyebrows, making himself look smaller, weaker… *deferential*. ‘You like the power it gives you. You like being the one to comfort me, and protect me from it.’ He leans in, brushing the words onto Hannibal’s lips with his own. ‘I do, too… So make me suffer.’

I am making you suffer, Hannibal thinks, turning his head to kiss Will’s fingertips before he closes his eyes and tilts his face into the caress. But he appreciates the gesture, so he lets go of the desk and pulls Will up against his body, their chests and hips flush together, nudging

Will to tip his head back. Fixes his teeth, very carefully, over his windpipe and then bites, hard enough to drag a broken gasp from his Omega and make his scent thicken with desire.

Alpha…

Will slides both hands through Hannibal's silky hair, holding him close, encouraging the dominant grip, and arches his spine so that he's as open and vulnerable as he can make himself. Shudders when Hannibal pulls his teeth from the indents in his throat and gazes into his face, at the red rings blazing around dark, molten brown irises…

'Hannibal,' he breathes, yanking his Alpha in for a desperate kiss. He rocks against his hip, dropping his hands to Hannibal's shoulders and holding tight as fire scorches him. 'I'll say please,' he whispers, and, when Hannibal's breath catches in his throat, he knows he's hooked him.

Will gives him one last, lingering kiss, and Hannibal's chest tightens at what his mate is offering him, but he can't find words when his Omega takes a step back and sinks to his knees, arms out to his sides with his wrists and palms up in offering.

'You can't control what's going to happen to me,' Will says, speaking simply and calmly despite his racing heart. He's nervous, but he wants to look after his mate, and this is something he *can* do. Something he has utter power over. 'And that scares you.' He tilts his head even further back and keens for his Alpha. 'But you *can* control *me*.'

Hannibal's eyes flash crimson and he curls his lips back from his teeth in a snarl. Will doesn't hide his shiver, doesn't stop his whimper, but he holds very still as the Alpha approaches.

Hannibal nuzzles his hair, moving around him, inspecting him, before coming to a stop behind him. Slides a hand down around the front of his throat and grips tight, hauling Will back against his legs in a choke. *Owning* him. Threatening his life.

Surrender or die.

Will's stomach flips and he looks up at his mate, at the starving, *dangerous* expression on the Alpha's face.

'I'm yours,' he whispers, trembling fingers reaching down to pull his sweater up. Hannibal growls again and changes his grip so that he's got Will by the jaw as the Omega struggles to get his top off. Lets go for just long enough that the soft wool can slide over Will's head and then grabs a fistful of curls, tugging hard as he moves to stand in front of his mate.

'Show me,' he says, his voice rasping with rut hormones. Watches as Will hurries to unbutton his suit trousers and then yanks his Omega's head closer to his throbbing erection, groaning as Will purrs at the rough handling and nuzzles him, sucking up his scent.

'*Yours*,' Will moans, tingles chasing each other up and down his spine. His crest feels swollen, pulsing with his heartbeat and *itching* to be bitten. He shoves Hannibal's boxers down and moans as he frees his Alpha's length, leaning in to lick and kiss across the sensitive tip, squirming as slick dribbles down his thighs at his enjoyment of the salty taste.

Hannibal winds both hands around Will's head, holding him close, shuddering as the Omega swallows him down in one smooth, eager motion. He purrs at the feel of hot wetness all around his tender flesh, at the muscles in Will's throat closing and stroking him.

Will purrs again, adding vibrations to the rasp of tongue and the softness of his mouth. Holds onto Hannibal's hip with one hand as the other reaches down to cup and roll his Alpha's balls. He stares up at him, pouring all his love for him into his eyes, and tears well when he sees gold fire glow around Hannibal's face.

I'm yours.

'Mine,' Hannibal growls, thrusting into Will's mouth, holding him in place as he fucks himself on the feeling of *owning* him, completely. It's dizzying, and he can feel climax building quickly. He pants, trying to maintain eye contact, to watch Will's surrender, but he has to squeeze his eyes shut as shockwaves of pleasure rip through him. It's a brutal orgasm, hard and fast, and he staggers, leaning back against the desk, releasing Will's head to brace himself because his thighs are trembling too much to hold him.

Will falls forwards, hugging Hannibal tight, nuzzling and kissing him as he softens, licking his lips to catch every drop of seed given to him. He's floating in heat, drunk on Hannibal's pleasure, his brain melting in his skull until *all* he knows is Hannibal, all he *sees* is Hannibal…

'Alpha,' he whispers, spreading his hands over Hannibal's hips, rubbing his nose through the coarse hair in front of him. '*Hannibal*...'

Hannibal hums, waiting to catch his breath. Plays with Will's hair, basking in the realization that Will really means it; he's *entirely* Hannibal's to hurt, to *fuck*, to *devour*. He wonders if it's always like this with Omegas; if so, it's no wonder they're so coveted.

'Stand up, Will,' he says, watching as Will hurries to obey, cheeks flushed and lips swollen, hair a mess from Hannibal's grip and eyes bright with fever. *Good enough to eat*, Hannibal thinks, and sees Will quiver in response to the emotion he can sense. Hannibal wets his lips and then flicks his fingers at Will's lower half. 'Strip.'

Will kicks off his boots and pulls his trousers and boxers down his legs, removing them with his socks and shoving everything to the side. He's hard, but he makes no move to cover himself; forcing his hands to stay by his sides. He can feel the heat pouring off him, rising around him until he's sweating with it, but he shivers because Hannibal is staring at him with that same hungry, dangerous look on his face, and he doesn't know what he's going to do next.

'Touch yourself,' Hannibal murmurs, undoing his shirt cuffs ready to remove his own clothes. Sees Will's pupils widen and sweat roll down his forehead as the Omega takes hold of himself and begins to stroke, hard down, gently up, gathering pearly wetness from the tip to smooth the friction. Hannibal smirks, shrugging out of his suit jacket and draping it over the desk, followed by his waistcoat. He undoes his tie, running it through his fingers, locking eyes with Will and purring when the Omega shudders at the memory of the other day…

Hannibal waits, his darkness curling in the air between them, swelling when Will's shadow slips free of its chains and joins him. Baring his teeth in challenge, Will breaks the command and steps closer, still touching himself, reaching for the silk with his other hand.

'*Please*…' he purrs, *daring* Hannibal to hurt him. To punish him.

It's a perfect excuse, and Hannibal's eyes blaze red as he snarls at his mate's disobedience. He lunges forward and grabs Will by the throat, squeezing tight enough to feel Will's pulse flutter beneath his palms. Pulls the Omega close and then shoves him down to his knees again, knocking his legs wide apart with his foot.

'Arms out,' he growls, keeping his right hand at Will's throat as he twists the other into his hair. Jerks Will's head back, making it hard for him to breathe, and then claims his mouth in a bruising kiss, placing his leg just between Will's thighs so that the tip of the Omega's length brushes the fabric of his trousers.

Will shudders, clenching his hands into fists as he holds them out to either side of his body, his hips jumping at the feel of soft wool against his throbbing flesh. But Hannibal shifts away, and he can't follow because the grip on his curls is too tight, leaving him *aching* and desperate. He can feel the skin around his neck smarting; there'll be bruises where Hannibal's fingers and nails have dug into him, and his scalp is stinging from the hard tugs. He squirms, slick making his ass cheeks slippery, and moans into Hannibal's lips. When his Alpha breaks the kiss, he falls forward at the loss, but he does nothing to stop the pressure against his windpipe, choking him, cutting off his air.

Alpha…

He stares up at Hannibal, rewarded with another purring growl from his mate at the display, before his Alpha pushes him up again, helping him balance.

'Very good, Will.'

Hannibal strokes his Omega's hair, soothing him, and then wraps the tie around his eyes, blinding him.

His sight disappears and, with it, his control over his body. Panic snatches his breath for a second before Will tells himself to relax… This is *exactly* what he asked for. *Exactly* what Hannibal *needs* to do right now…

Hannibal hears Will gasp before his muscles lock rigid as he freezes in place, paralyzed by his Alpha. He leans down to nuzzle Will's jawline, savoring the sight of him, utterly helpless, hands busy undoing his belt and slipping it free of his trousers as he kisses his mate's cheeks and throat, coming to rest over his racing pulse.

'That's it, Will,' he breathes. 'Do you trust me?'

'I trust you,' Will whispers, slurring the words because he can't keep from sinking into the shadows, his control slipping away. His shoulders are starting to ache from holding his arms out to the sides, and pain laps at his consciousness, but he's so *warm* and safe… Will can feel

himself wading into the dark current, filling his body with golden heat… All he knows is the thick, rich scent of his Alpha... He needs him… He *loves* him… '*Hannibal*…?'

'I'm here,' Hannibal murmurs, walking around to stand behind him again and looping his belt like a noose around Will's throat. He pulls it tight, letting the metal buckle pinch at his crest. Will whimpers, but Hannibal can smell the sugary sweetness of his slick getting stronger. Sees his length twitch at the threat and groans at how *beautiful* his mate is.

He hauls Will back against his legs, winding the leather around his hand to use as a handle, giving himself total control over Will's ability to breathe. Chokes him for a moment, reminding his Omega how very *vulnerable* he is. He can feel the heat radiating from Will, and he knows he's fast disappearing into prodrome… The intensity of the session could throw him into heat, but it's worth the risk – Hannibal wants to take what Will has offered him. He wants it all.

Leaning down, he traces the fingertips of his free hand over Will's shaking arms, humming with satisfaction when the Omega whines a voiceless plea to lower them.

'You're going to *ache* later, Will,' he chuckles, nipping at Will's earlobe and then suckling at the skin just beneath. 'And you're going to wonder *why*.'

'Hannibal…'

'Tell me, Will; would you do anything for me?' Hannibal asks, sliding his hand over Will's tense chest, stroking and squeezing his nipple.

'*Yes*,' Will gasps, mewling when Hannibal yanks on the belt again, strangling him. He relaxes his hands, palms up in surrender, and a tear slides down his cheek when his Alpha finally lets him breathe.

'Would you kill for me?' Hannibal whispers, bringing his hand around from Will's chest, over his ribs and through the sweat on his back, up to his burning hot crest. Will's sharp cry cuts off as the belt snaps tight again, and Hannibal growls, brushing and squeezing the ridges as he counts the seconds. He smells when Will's scent suddenly changes, thickening to a rich syrup that makes his mouth water, and then he relaxes, allowing his Omega to gulp enough air to respond.

'*Yes*.'

Will's voice is hoarse and flat. He's gone; lost to pre-heat hormones, and although his arms are still shaking where he's holding them out, the rest of him is utterly relaxed.

All mine, Hannibal thinks, placing his hand flat between Will's shoulder blades, feeling tendons grind as he holds position. *Complete submission.*

He gives Will a second's notice and then pulls the leather up, forcing him to stretch his neck and back up, leaving him just enough air that he won't pass out. Won't die.

‘And do you still want me to hurt you?’ he purrs, locking his teeth around the burning ridges of Will’s crest. He feels the other man’s throat move beneath the belt as Will gulps at the promise of the bite to come; at the pain… And then, just when he thinks he’ll change his mind, he hears Will speak.

‘Yes.’

***

Where is he?

Will comes back to himself slowly, curled up in a nest of soft throws and blankets. He knows these smells… Dogs and grass… Fish and *Hannibal*…

He’s home. In his bed… His *nest*, which Hannibal has clearly added to, given the amount of silk lined blankets and fur throws… Will huffs a laugh, but it quickly turns into a wince when he tries to roll over, to look for his Alpha.

Every part of him is throbbing agony in time to his heartbeat. How…?

Will runs shaking fingers over himself, frowning when he only finds a few scratches, welts and bruises; nothing that should be causing this level of pain.

Where’s Hannibal?

He whimpers when he moves, flexing the cramp from his calf muscles, tears springing to his eyes when he tries to sit up. His crest flares and he cries at how *sharp* the sting is. His arms go out from under him and he shudders as he snuggles back into the mattress.

Safe. He’s safe here, in his house, in Wolf Trap.

Will fights the exhaustion dragging his eyelids down and tries to remember what happened. He’d been with Hannibal… In his office… They’d been talking about Beth LeBeau’s killer… Her *Omega*… And then…

I asked Hannibal to hurt me.

Will snorts at his own stupidity, and tucks a blanket closer to his chin, soothing himself with Hannibal’s smell. His Alpha must have scent-marked the bedding, or laid down with him for a while… Will isn’t sure, but it doesn’t matter, just as long as he can smell the other man near him. On him. *In* him…

I asked him to hurt me… I asked him to leave me… So I could sleep alone…

He slips into a fitful doze, snatches of half-eaten girls and the ebony stag stabbing at his temples until his head pounds. He misses Hannibal; his skin is raw and every little sound jerks him from sleep.

Sweat beads on his skin, trickling like tears down flushed cheeks and soaking into the Egyptian cotton sheets beneath him.

Hannibal…

Will whimpers, clutching at the soft fleece around him, shaking hard enough to make his teeth chatter. His brain is on fire; his bones are blackening, cracking and spilling ash into his blood…

He rolls his hips, panting at the cramp inside him as he tightens around *nothing*.

Lost to prodromal nightmares, he has no idea he's being watched by a pair of bloodshot amber eyes staring out from a bruised and distorted face… No idea there's another Omega at the window, whining at the pain he's in…

Alpha…

***

'We matched tissue samples from the crime scene to your daughter's medical records.'

Sat at the meeting table in his office at Quantico the next day, Jack explains to Mrs Madchen how her Omega daughter was identified as the killer responsible for Beth LeBeau's death.

'I was almost relieved when I got that phone call,' Mrs Madchen says, tears trickling down her cheeks. 'I thought that you'd found her and that she'd be… um…' She sniffs, pain brightening her eyes at what she'd thought of saying. 'Would be at peace…'

'You thought she might be dead,' Will says, looking at her from the other side of the glass table. He's wearing one of his dark shirts, loosely tucked into his trousers so that it doesn't rub against his bruises and welts. Sprayed himself with Beta scent and slipped his glasses on because the gold in his eyes won't darken today. Maybe he needs stronger drops, or maybe it's just because Jack is sitting right beside him, smothering him with his Alpha stench…

Mrs Madchen laughs, but it's a bitter, desperate sound, and fresh tears drip onto her light blouse.

'Well, that makes me sound like a horrible mother,' she replies, and Will looks down, hating how *inept* he can be sometimes. How cruel. 'I tried to be a good mom,' the Beta continues. 'I tried to do everything that I could.' She shakes her head. 'I just don't want her to be in pain.'

'No one's doubting your dedication to your daughter, Mrs Madchen,' Jack says. And then, because he hasn't realized it himself, he asks, 'How well did she know Beth LeBeau?'

'They were bonded,' Mrs Madchen replies, sounding surprised by the question. 'They were best friends; they went to school together…' She grimaces. 'Until it was *unsafe* for Georgia to go to school… But Beth always came to see her… And then, when Georgia was sixteen and she had her first heat… Beth bonded her.'

Jack takes a deep breath, visibly shaken at the idea of an Omega attacking and killing her mate.

‘When did you first recognize that your daughter was struggling with mental illness?’ he asks.

Mrs Madchen’s eyes cloud over and she sighs.

‘When she was *nine*,’ she says. ‘And she told me that she was thinking about killing me… and said that she was already dead.’

Gritting his teeth to keep from shivering at the *exhaustion* and pain rolling from the woman across the table from him, Will can’t help but ask,

‘What sort of symptoms did she have?’

Mrs Madchen bows her head, her shoulders hunched and spilling brown hair around her jaw.

‘She had seizures, hallucinations… psychotic depression.’

Jack, sensing Will’s personal interest in his question, glances at him. An Alpha, concerned for the Omega in his care… Will refuses to look at him. *I know I’m not dead*.

Mrs Madchen laughs again, more tears welling in her eyes.

‘I was grateful when she was catatonic,’ she confesses.

‘Was she ever violent?’ Jack asks, drawing her attention again. She nods.

‘Sometimes.’

Will takes a breath, trying to get his erratic heartbeat under control. Ignores the way his palms are sweating and his leg is bouncing.

‘What did her doctors say?’

‘Not much,’ the Beta replies. ‘She spent months at a time in the hospital… Specialist Omega care… Beth paid for most of it. Blood tests and *brain* scans, and *all* of them inconclusive.’

Fear slips like ice down his spine, and his crest prickles. Will blinks, trying to ground himself, and stares down at the photograph of Georgia again… Taken the day after Beth bonded her… She looks so *happy*… So *normal*…

‘They could never tell me what was wrong,’ Mrs Madchen says wearily.

‘And you still don’t know?’ Will asks, frowning at her. The Beta shrugs, shakes her head and fights a sob, her voice wobbling as she replies,

‘They’d just say it was *this* or it was *that*… They would just…’ She sighs and shakes her head. ‘They were just *always* guessing. And, Beth and I, we did our own research… I wrote down *every* word that the doctors said… The different terminology… Learned a lot.’ She nods to herself, wiping dampness from her cheeks. ‘But mostly, what I learned, is… um… how *little* is actually known about mental illness. *Especially* in Omegas.’

Will can't help but look at her, at the devastation this disease has caused… At the way it's ripped a family apart…

'All they know,' Mrs Madchen concludes, 'Is that it's *rarely* about finding solutions… It's just more about managing *expectations*.'

Will stares at her, but he doesn't *see* her. He sees himself, a shaking, screaming wreck in a padded cell, wearing a crest brace to keep him calm and pliant when Hannibal comes to visit… Sees the *regret* on his Alpha's face… The unspoken wish that he'd never bonded him…

I can't do that to him, Will thinks. *I won't... I'd rather kill myself than let that happen.*

***

After escorting Mrs Madchen from the building, Will walks slowly back to Jack's office. The Alpha is waiting for him, leant back against one of the leather meeting chairs, anger and worry etched into the lines of his face. He looks up when the Omega lets himself in, and Will stands a distance from him, his hands curled into fists in the pockets of his trousers.

'Managing your expectations?' he asks bitterly. Jack rolls his eyes at him.

'*Changing* my expectations,' he replies, and Will ducks his head; a silent apology.

Jack sighs.

'Y'know, when Miriam Lass died, I had to come back here to this office to pack up… But, that got to be too overwhelming. I thought I should just *leave*, seeing as how I'd gotten a trainee, an *Omega*, killed.' He straightens, coming closer to Will as he continues, 'That lack of leadership on my part, that was *my* responsibility.'

'You didn't kill Miriam Lass,' Will replies, holding very still as the Alpha's warm, musky scent wraps around him. Jack's worried; he looks angry, but it's not at Will. He's *protective* of Will, and it makes Will want to defend him, even from himself. 'The Chesapeake Ripper did.'

'It didn't *feel* that way to me,' Jack explains. 'I pulled her out of a classroom, like I pulled *you* out of a classroom.'

Will scoffs at the parallel and shakes his head.

'Oh… N-… She was a *student*; I'm a *teacher*.'

'You're both *Omegas*,' Jack says, barely lowering his voice. Will flinches, but the Alpha plows on, regardless. 'I'm still *just* as responsible for you as I was for her.'

You're not my Alpha, Jack, Will thinks, his shadow swarming him with darkness. He can feel his eyes itching, the gold thickening, and he lifts his chin defiantly.

'I'll take my *own* responsibility.'

Jack's eyes flash red at the challenge.

'Well not from *me* you won't!' he growls. 'We can do it together. *I* broke the *rules* with Miriam. I encouraged *her* to break the rules; I am breaking the rules with you *now*.'

'By letting an unstable agent do field work?' Will snaps.

'*Special* Agent,' Jack reminds him, the reminder like a slap in the face that makes him turn his head away. 'That means you represent the FBI. You still represent *me*.'

'Have I *misrepresented* you, Jack?' Will demands, his throat closing up around what feels suspiciously like a whine, his crest pulsing with heat as a headache slices through the top of his skull. He can't *deal* with this right now.

'*No*, no… But you have me curious,' Jack replies. '*Why* are you still here, when the *both* of us know that this is *bad* for you?'

Will looks away, fighting his instinct to submit, to let tears fall from his aching eyes, and squashes the urge to drop to his knees.

'Do you want me to *quit*?' he snarls.

'*No*,' Jack replies, shaking his head. 'No; you had an opportunity to quit. You didn't take it; why not?'

Will hesitates, trying to find the words, but Jack continues before he can speak.

'Let me tell you what I think. I think that the work you do here has created a sense of *stability* for you.'

Will nods, considering this, and Jack takes it as tacit agreement.

'Stability is *good* for you, Will. *All* Omegas need it.'

'Stability requires strong foundations, Jack,' Will replies, pulling his glasses off because he just doesn't want anything *extra* on his body right now. 'My moorings are built on *sand*.'

'I'm not *sand*,' Jack argues. 'I am *bedrock*!' He shakes his head in frustration. 'When you doubt yourself, you don't have to doubt *me*, too.' His expression softens a fraction. 'I'm your Alpha, Will. For as long as you're unbonded and you work for me, I am that person for you.'

I have an Alpha…

Will can feel bile scratch at his throat, his body responding to Jack's claim as if the other Alpha had put his hands on him… He's *Hannibal's…*

But he can't *say* that, because he doesn't want Jack to know; doesn't want him to stop him from spending time with Hannibal, professionally. He ignores the sickness churning in his gut and forces a single nod, blinking away the stinging in his eyes. *I'm not betraying Hannibal… I'm his… All his…*

Jack nods, and gives him once last sigh of frustration before he turns away. Will waits for just long enough that it doesn't look suspicious and then hurries from the room, bolting into the nearest bathroom and dry heaving into a toilet before the door has even stopped swinging.

Sinking to the floor, he hugs his knees to his chest and rests his sweaty forehead on his forearms. Tries to ground himself in the memory of his Alpha's hands, his face, his lips… But he's wearing scent-deadening spray and Hannibal hasn't touched or washed these clothes… All he can smell is himself, his vomit and urine.

A whimper gets stuck in his throat and he scrubs at his cheeks. Fumbles to pull his cell phone from his pocket and stares at the one photograph he lets himself have of Hannibal… An image downloaded from the society pages of the Baltimore Times, of Hannibal at the charity opera…

Stroking the screen with a forefinger, Will rests his aching head back on the tiled wall and finally lets the tears flow.

I'm yours… Alpha… I promise. I'm all yours.

The evening can't come soon enough.

***

Hosting Dr Sutcliffe for dinner before Will comes to spend the night, Hannibal has chosen to prepare a special dish for one of his friend's last meals.

'The jamón Ibérico,' he announces, presenting the leg on a chrome stand in the middle of the dining table.

Sitting beside him, Sutcliffe chuckles as his friend carves wafer thin slices of pork from the haunch.

'Still love your little rare treats, don't you, Hannibal?' he teases, smoothing out his napkin and laying it over his lap, ready to eat. 'The more expensive and difficult they are to obtain, the better.'

'It's a distinction that adds an expectation of quality,' Hannibal explains, but Sutcliffe scoffs.

'Not always,' he replies, taking a sip of his wine.

Leaving the carved meat on the leg for his fellow Alpha to help himself, Hannibal returns to his own seat as he speaks.

'Well, for Ibérico, only a few thousand are selected each year,' he explains. '*But* is the pig, once fattened and slaughtered and air-cured, really superior to any other pig?' He gestures to the joint with his knife. 'Or is it simply a matter of reputation preceding product?'

Sutcliffe nods thoughtfully, and then shrugs.

‘It’s irrelevant,’ he says, holding up a forkful of pork. ‘If the *meat-eater* thinks it’s superior, then *belief* determines *value*.’ And he shoves it all into his mouth, moaning softly at the taste and texture as it melts onto his tongue.

‘A case of psychology overriding neurology,’ Hannibal replies, lifting his own forkful to his mouth and chewing slowly to savor the flavors of Iberian ham and olives.

‘So, we know how *Ibérico* gets his pigs,’ Sutcliffe continues, narrowing his eyes at Hannibal. ‘How did you get *yours*?’

Suppressing a growl, feeling his eyes itch with the need to flash red at the casually tossed insult to his mate, Hannibal gives himself a moment before replying,

‘Are you referring to Will Graham?’

Sutcliffe considers him, sensing the offence his quip has caused. Softens his tone as he adds,

‘We know you’re fond of the rarified.’ He returns to scooping olives and pork slivers onto his fork. ‘What makes *him* so rare?’

Hannibal chooses his words carefully.

‘Even for an Omega, Will has a *remarkably* vivid imagination,’ he says. His expression softens as he thinks of the darkness and poetic violence that his mate is capable of conjuring. ‘Beautiful… Pure empathy, beyond *anything* I’ve seen before, even among his caste. Nothing he can’t understand, and that terrifies him.’

Sutcliffe frowns at him, confused by the *pride* and affection warming Hannibal’s tone.

‘So you set his mind on fire?’

‘Imagination is an interesting accelerant for a heat,’ Hannibal replies.

Sutcliffe pokes at more ham, sighing before he asks,

‘So… how far does this go? When he has his heat, with the swelling in his brain… do you put out the fire, or do you let him burn?’

Hannibal sets his cutlery down and swallows, looking at Sutcliffe calmly.

‘Will is my mate.’ He allows a tiny smile to curl his lips. ‘We will put out the fire… when it’s necessary.’

‘He *has* asked for more tests,’ Sutcliffe replies, and Hannibal nods. Lifts his glass of Rioja as he speaks.

‘Now that we have confirmed what it is, it’ll be easier to hide from him.’

Sutcliffe watches as Hannibal inhales the scent before taking a slow, delicate sip. Unease prickles the back of his neck, and he lowers his fork.

‘How often does he sleep alone?’ he asks, prompting Hannibal to raise an eyebrow at him. ‘For a pair so recently bonded, you seem to spend a great deal of time apart.’

‘Will values his independence,’ Hannibal replies. ‘I want to give that to him.’

‘*And* you know the isolation will increase his fear, hastening his heat,’ Sutcliffe says, prompting Hannibal to smile.

‘Will responds more favorably to anger than to fear,’ he replies. ‘He deals with fear every day; he’s become accustomed at managing it.’

‘He’s quite unusual, for an Omega,’ Sutcliffe comments, resuming eating. ‘You say you met him in the field? How is that possible?’

Hannibal spears an olive with his fork and holds it up to the light, inspecting the sheen of oil on its skin.

‘He works with an unorthodox Alpha,’ he replies, and Sutcliffe chuckles.

‘And he’s mated to another one.’

Popping the olive into his mouth, Hannibal chews thoroughly before looking at Sutcliffe again.

‘When you conduct further tests on Will, what will you tell him?’ he asks.

‘Well… I think they’re going to be inconclusive again,’ the other Alpha replies. ‘Perhaps some elevated adrenaline… Something caused by stress, no doubt.’

Hannibal’s eyes gleam, and he nods slowly.

‘I estimate five, maybe six days until his heat,’ he says. ‘You can allay your fears, doctor. Soon, this will be nothing but a bad memory for Will.’

***

Letting himself into the house, Will finds Hannibal tidying up in the dining room, and drapes his jacket over a chair so that he can help his Alpha carry plates through to the kitchen. Pauses when he sees the leg of pork and platters of half-finished food on the counters, raising his eyebrows at Hannibal.

‘You cooked *all* this for Sutcliffe?’ he asks, smiling despite the pain in his temples and the churning heat in his gut. ‘You’re aware this is a *classic* example of Alpha posturing?’

‘A simple case of overindulgence,’ Hannibal replies, grinning at his Omega’s disapproval. ‘Have you eaten?’

‘Er, no, actually.’ Will grimaces, and rubs the back of his head, shrugging at the sharp look his Alpha gives him. ‘I guess I forgot…’

Hannibal abandons the dishes and moves around the counter. Walks Will backwards until he hits the island and pins him with a knee between his thighs.

‘You’re a terrible liar, Will,’ he purrs, cupping the side of his Omega’s face and encouraging him to lift his head so he can place a gentle kiss on his lips. ‘What happened?’

Will tries to shake his head, but Hannibal tightens his grip, holding him still. Slick tickles his ass cheeks in memory of the last time he was pinned in place… Controlled *completely*... His breath catches and warmth spreads out from his belly.

‘*Hannibal*…’

‘You were too upset to eat,’ Hannibal says, dipping close enough that his words flow across Will’s lips. ‘Why?’

Will moans, leaning forwards, trying to get Hannibal to kiss him again. He spreads his hands flat across his Alpha’s broad chest, fiddling with the buttons of his waistcoat, trying to sneak underneath the silk.

‘Just something Jack said,’ he mumbles. ‘It doesn’t matter.’

Hannibal pushes Will’s hands away, squeezing his wrists in warning. Will sighs, his mouth twisting in unhappiness.

‘He… just said that *he* was my Alpha… Because he thinks I’m unbonded.’

Hannibal hums, and releases one of Will’s wrists to stroke through his hair instead, cupping the back of his head and pulling him closer so that they can rest their foreheads together.

‘You’re *mine*, Will,’ he murmurs, and Will purrs at the claim, holding onto Hannibal’s hips instead. He snuggles closer and kisses Hannibal’s jaw, his nose and his cheek, until he can get to his mouth again.

‘Yours,’ he promises, hooking his thumbs into the belt loops of his Alpha’s trousers. ‘*All* yours…’

‘All mine,’ Hannibal agrees, but he catches Will’s hands again and stops him before he can undo anything. ‘Eat,’ he says firmly, narrowing his eyes when Will rolls his eyes and groans. ‘*Will*. I’m responsible for you. Eat.’

Reaching around Hannibal, Will grabs a sliver of Iberian ham and bunches it up, shoving it into his mouth before kissing his Alpha again. He snorts a laugh when Hannibal growls at him, and dances out of the way when Hannibal tries to pin him again.

‘You can feed me, Dr Lecter,’ he says, backing away very slowly towards the kitchen door. ‘*If* it’s in bed and we’re both naked.’

‘Whatever I want you to eat?’ Hannibal replies, and Will’s eyes flicker gold. He nods very slowly, his hands rising to undo his shirt buttons.

‘*Anything*.’

‘However much I want you to eat?’

‘*All* of it,’ Will promises, peeling the thick cotton from his sweaty skin. There’s a flicker of something in the back of his mind, a moment where he wonders why he’s always hot, even in winter, but then his shadow tickles across his crest and he can’t help but whine in longing. It doesn’t matter; all that matters is having Hannibal with him. *In* him. *Owning* him. Always.

‘I’ll make you a plate, then,’ Hannibal says, grinning, and Will nods, fingers now working to undo his belt and the button of his trousers.

‘I’ll be upstairs,’ he replies, his cheeks flushing pink as his blood warms his veins. ‘Don’t be long…?’

‘Keep yourself entertained, Will,’ Hannibal says, taking out a fresh plate to prepare a buffet for his mate. ‘Touch yourself and think of me.’

‘Fucker,’ Will mutters, his breath hitching at the order. He hurries upstairs, kicking off his shoes and clothes as soon as he’s inside the bedroom doorway. Hannibal’s already lit a fire, and the crackling flames make shadows dance across the walls.

The bed is made, and Will’s stretches out on top of the silky quilt, his head turned to burrow into Hannibal’s pillow, relishing the scent of his Alpha on the cotton, trailing his fingers through the beads of sweat gathered in the vale between his pectoral muscles and the line running down his abdomen. He can smell his scent rising in the air, sweet and smoky, sugary with slick, and he parts his lips to make a tiny, whimpering sound of *need* at how *hot* he feels. How… *peaceful*.

Alpha…

The current rises inside him, lapping at his crest. Will imagines himself floating in a warm, black lake. Time slows until every ripple expands to the edge of the universe… Shadows coil around his neck, a whispering memory of Hannibal’s belt, and he can see a hundred thousand stars flicker overhead; gold and red against the darkness…

Strong hands slide up his thighs, over his hips, slipping *inside* him until Hannibal is cradling his beating heart between his palms, *owning* him. Keeping him safe…

I’m yours… I am your design…

Lying naked beside his prodromal Omega, Hannibal traces patterns around and across his nipples, watching the flickering gold in Will’s blue eyes. He adjusts his weight, supporting himself on his elbow. He’s been watching him for several minutes, waiting for the right moment to disturb him, and then nudges an olive against Will’s lips.

‘Open,’ he murmurs, purring when Will obeys without question, swallowing with barely a chew.

‘*Hannibal…*’

Will's voice is barely more than a whisper, and he struggles to roll his head to the side, staring at his Alpha with a dazed, worried look. Hannibal soothes him, urging him to eat a slice of ham and manchego cheese.

'You're going to go into heat soon,' he says softly, resting the plate on Will's quivering stomach, making him huff and flinch at the feel of cold china against his flushed skin. Hannibal strokes a curl back from his sticky forehead and leans down to kiss him, rasping his tongue through the salty, sweet Omega sweat until Will moans. 'A few more days and you'll start to feel better.'

He holds out a tomato for Will to eat, kissing him and tasting the tangy juice in the corner of his mouth afterwards, before he slips two fingers into the inferno of Will's mouth and groaning at the feel of his Omega sucking and licking them with the same devotion that he gives his length.

'That's good, Will.' Hannibal pulls his fingers free, replacing them with more ham, and dips his hand between Will's legs, steadying the plate when Will tries to arch. 'Easy… Hold still for me.'

Will whimpers, swallowing the meat so that he can concentrate on the feel of his Alpha's thumb rubbing just behind his balls as his fingers circle the pulsing ring of tight muscle, gathering up slick ready to push inside him. He makes sure to keep his torso completely flat on the bed, though, and breathes slowly through his nose so as not to knock the food again.

'*Hannibal*…'

'Are you afraid?' Hannibal whispers, easing his forefinger inside Will as his Omega spreads his thighs, hands clenching in the quilt beside him, a shudder running up his spine to blow his pupils wide and thicken the gold around his irises.

'*Ohh… fuck…'* Will licks his lips, trying to concentrate, trying to *think*, but he can't focus on anything but the feel of his Alpha's finger rubbing *that* spot inside him. He wants more, he wants *all* of Hannibal… He *needs* him… 'Alpha…'

'Answer me, Will,' Hannibal repeats, adding a second finger and pulling down, over and over until sweat rolls down Will's temples and darkens his hairline. Until his cheeks flush red and the blush spreads down his throat to color his chest.

'Yes,' Will whispers, staring up into Hannibal's eyes, his brow creasing in and out of a frown. 'If I let go… I don't want to hurt someone.'

'Who?' Hannibal murmurs, kissing Will's jawline, nuzzling his thundering pulse and sliding his hand beneath his head to squeeze his crest.

Will cries out, tears mingling with the sweat, and he grabs for the plate as another shudder rocks him. Cries into Hannibal's lips as his Alpha kisses him, working him with fingers at each end of his body, not letting him come but not giving him a chance to *breathe* either.

‘Who might you hurt, Will?’ Hannibal breathes, brushing the words across his mate’s scalding lips. Will pants, his breath burning, but he can’t close his eyes. Can’t keep from staring up into his Alpha’s face, into his red eyes, at the face of his *everything*.

‘Everyone,’ he gasps, bucking again as fire licks him with white pleasure, spilling cold buffet onto the bed. ‘Fuck… *fuck*, Hannibal!’

‘Everyone?’ Hannibal asks, rolling on top of him, pulling his fingers out of Will to shove the plate onto the side table and settle, heavily, between Will’s bent knees. ‘Anyone?’

‘Anyone,’ Will groans, grabbing for Hannibal’s flank, trying to pull him closer. ‘In… *Please*, Hannibal… In, *please*…’

‘You’re dangerous, Will,’ Hannibal purrs, taking hold of himself and guiding his throbbing hardness as deep inside his mate’s clenching body as he can. He holds his breath, feeling his hair fall over his forehead as he holds himself up, muscles trembling as he barely keeps from slamming into him. Will’s nails dig into his flesh and the Omega whines, *begging* him to move, to own him, claim him, mark him. Hannibal quivers, leaning down to cover the smaller man’s body with his own, their skin sliding over each other with Will’s sweat, fingers linking and holding tight, lips meeting to share breath and spit as they kiss.

‘I’ll do anything you want,’ Will promises, wrapping his legs tight around Hannibal’s waist, holding him close as his Alpha rocks his hips, fucking him with long, slow thrusts that snatch his breath, sending him spiraling into dizzying blackness. ‘*Fuck… Hannibal…*’

‘I’m here,’ Hannibal replies, releasing one hand to brace himself on the mattress, angling his hips to catch that spot inside Will with every inch. He pins his Omega’s right hand beside his head, squeezing the faded marks on his wrists, and then abandons it to hold the nape of his neck, cupping his crest. ‘That’s it; come for me, come on, Will.’

‘*Hannibal!*’ Will chokes on his Alpha’s name and his eyes roll back as his entire body tenses up and shakes with the force of the orgasm ripping through him. He shudders, rocking down and clenching, painfully tight, around Hannibal’s swelling knot. He cries out, panting hard, and spasms at the feel of Hannibal’s seed pumping into him, hot against his throbbing insides. ‘*Fuck*!’

Hannibal groans a laugh, collapsing on top of his shivering mate, seeing bright sparks before his eyes. *Fuck indeed,* he thinks. As crude as it is, sometimes Will’s expletive is the only suitable word for how *good* it can be with him.

Cradling him close, he brushes his lips back and forth over Will’s damp forehead. Will purrs softly, content to be held by his Alpha, no thought beyond the satisfaction of having his mate’s seed safe inside him.

Hannibal takes the time to savor the feeling of peace stealing over him, knowing that, in less than a week, there will be no respite for either of them. He traces Will’s cheeks, his shoulders, collarbone and down his arms, lifting himself up to stare down into gold-blue eyes as Will stares, adorably unfocussed, at him.

‘You’re all mine, Will,’ he murmurs, kissing him again when Will nods and then dipping his head to whisper into his ear, ‘Make me proud.’

***

Will returns to the Omega clinic the following evening; a special late-night visit that Hannibal arranged just for him so that he doesn’t have to take any further time off work.

Knowing that his Alpha is waiting for him at home, and that he trusts him to do this alone, lessens the pain in his chest. Even without Hannibal by his side, the empty waiting room and lack of patronizing Beta nurses makes it a much easier experience than before.

Dr Sutcliffe greets him at the doors to the MRI suite, and shows him into a small changing area just off to the side, where Will strips and changes into the soft Omega hospital gown. He gets up onto the padded table, refusing to acknowledge the way his belly is writhing with nerves and his skin is crawling from how *close* the other Alpha is.

I’ll be back with Hannibal soon… Nothing’s going to happen…

‘Put these in,’ Dr Sutcliffe says, holding out a little case. As before, Will screws silicone plugs into his ears to deaden the noise of the scanner, and then lies back, his breath catching at the way the Alpha’s eyes travel over his face and neck. He can feel his pulse in his fingertips, and sweat beads on his forehead. His crest tingles and he’s acutely aware that the gown and his boxers leave little to the imagination, but Sutcliffe is respectful, and keeps his eyes above waist level.

‘This’ll be over before you know it,’ he promises, smiling down at him as he presses the button to start the machine.

Sliding into the scanner, Will has the strangest sensation that he’s being watched by someone *other* than Sutcliffe. It’s unnerving, but he can also smell slick sweetening his scent because it’s *familiar*... Heat rolls through him, making him dizzy, and black swarms his vision, sparking white and gold in the air above him. He can feel the tide pulling out in his head and Will closes his eyes, ignoring the red light of the scanner frame over his head.

He imagines Hannibal’s scent, rich and musky, caressing him. Imagines his voice, soft in the quiet of the room. A strong hand squeezing his thigh. Comforting him.

Let go, Will. That’s it… Just let go…

He’s floating. Peaceful. Will lets the current rock him to sleep, tension draining from him as he obeys his Alpha’s voice. The whir and bangs of the MRI fade and he’s *nowhere*… He’s *nothing… No one*…

He comes back to himself after several minutes of silence. The table slides out of the scanner and he sits up. Is it over?

Will frowns. Looks around for Dr Sutcliffe, but the room is empty. Where is he? How long has he been in there?

Pulling the earplugs out, he gets down from the table and wanders into the monitor room. Nothing, though the clock on the wall says he's lost almost two hours. Will goes to the door and peers out into the corridor, but there's still no sign of Sutcliffe. Of anyone…

Maybe he's gone back to his office to wait for him…

Unknotting his gown as he walks, Will returns to the changing room. Dresses in his own clothes but leaves his coat draped over his arm because it's really warm in the hospital and he's already sticky with sweat from his thick shirt and jumper.

As he approaches Dr Sutcliffe's office, his crest throbs and bile sours his throat. He can smell something sickly sweet and rotten… A resonance *and* a scent… His stomach flips when he sees a smear of blood on the handle. He doesn't want to open it, doesn't want to see, but he *has* to…

I had to...

His shadow whispers to him, purring into his ear as Will uses the sleeve of his jacket to turn the handle. He pushes the door away from him, following the hum of violence in the air, the ripple of darkness that smells *achingly* familiar… A memory, just out of reach, too faint to understand… His brain burns and Will's breath shimmers in front of his face as he approaches the desk.

'Dr Sutcliffe?'

The Alpha is there, leaning back in his chair… But there's something wrong… Something *very* wrong…

Will draws closer, his brow furrowing as he realizes what he's seeing…

Sutcliffe is dead, his jaw sawed nearly off in a sick copy of Beth LeBeau's Glasgow smile. It's bent back over the chair, a twisted parody of the Alpha's cheerful grin, and, despite the heat boiling the blood in his veins, Will can't help but shiver.

Did I do this?

He stumbles out of the office, bracing himself against the wall outside. Tries to catch his breath, his brain spinning.

Hannibal. He needs to call Hannibal. Before anyone, he needs his Alpha.

Fumbling for his cell phone, he pulls it from his jacket pocket and hits the speed dial for the other man. Hannibal answers after three rings.

'Hello, Will. How was the scan?'

'I need you,' Will replies, his voice tight. 'Something's happened.'

Hannibal is quiet for a moment, and then,

‘I’ll be right there. Stay where you are.’

Driving from his townhouse, the Alpha arrives in minutes, running down the corridor and sweeping him into his arms when Will begins to shake at the sight of him. Will grabs onto Hannibal’s shoulders, drowning in the panic that’s rising like a tidal wave inside him. He can’t keep from pulling him close and nuzzling his jaw, sucking up the smell of him, trying to ground himself.

‘I… I didn’t… I couldn’t…’

‘Sssh,’ Hannibal whispers, stroking Will’s curls from his clammy face. Checks his temperature and pulse before shrugging out of his coat and wrapping it around Will’s shoulders, allowing the distressed Omega to comfort himself with his scent and the feel of soft wool.

‘Sutcliffe’s dead,’ Will chokes, jerking his head towards the office door, his teeth chattering hard enough to hear. ‘I-I called Jack. He’s on his way. I just… I didn’t know…’

Hannibal stills, and Will whimpers in grief for him. He steps back and ducks his head when strong hands push him away, and Hannibal peers around the door into the office, at his friend’s dead body.

‘What happened?’ he asks, inscrutable eyes searching Will’s face.

Will shakes his head.

‘I don’t know,’ he mutters. ‘I’m not sure… I don’t know if it was me…’

‘Will!’

Jack’s voice rings out and Will flinches, shoving Hannibal’s coat back at him. Pulls his own jacket back on, instead, and puts some distance between him and his Alpha.

‘Here, Jack.’

Ten minutes later, he’s sat on the small couch in Sutcliffe’s office, holding very still as Beverly checks him for traces of blood spatter or other DNA from Sutcliffe. Tries not to flinch every time Zeller’s camera shutters snap, and studiously avoids Jack’s worried frown.

‘You’re clean,’ Beverly says, finishing the scan. She rests her hands on her thighs, leaning closer so that she can speak quietly. ‘You *couldn’t* have done this without getting something on you, and there’s *nothing* on you.’

‘I don’t *feel* clean,’ Will says, staring at Hannibal’s shoes, just visible behind Katz.

Hannibal schools his expression to neutrality so as not to betray his satisfaction at persuading Will to believe himself capable of murder.

Rising from beside Sutcliffe’s body, Jimmy Price holds up a pair of scissors and addresses the room.

‘The murder weapon has the same sort of diseased or damaged tissues that we found at Beth LeBeau’s house.’

‘What’s this guy got to do with the other victim?’ Zeller asks, looking confused. ‘I mean, is she just going after Alphas?’

Will clears his throat, gesturing to himself.

‘They have *me* in common,’ he says.

Beverly crosses her arms, taking in the business cards and medical certificates on the walls.

‘He was an Omega Specialist,’ she says. ‘Why were you getting an MRI from an *Omega* Specialist?’

‘Dr Sutcliffe was a good friend and colleague of mine,’ Hannibal explains, saving Will from lying. ‘He owed me a favor, and he specializes in neurology – of all kinds.’

‘Huh…’ Beverly nods slowly, but her dark eyes don’t leave Will’s face for a while. To ignore her and his thundering heart, Will pays attention to the change in Jack’s scent just before the other Alpha asks,

‘What do you remember?’

‘I remember coming here,’ Will replies. He taps his fingers together, shoulders hunched and head bowed as he tries to piece it together. It didn’t *feel* like losing time… Not like last time. ‘Going into the MRI, getting out and… finding Dr Sutcliffe’s body.’

‘No confusion,’ Jack checks, and Will huffs bitterly.

‘Well, not that I’m *aware* of,’ he says, but he gives Jack a pointed look to remind him that his memory is hardly the most *reliable* source these days.

Jack nods thoughtfully, his eyes flicking from Hannibal to Will.

‘Was your Dr Sutcliffe in the habit of seeing patients after hours, when he’s the only one in the office?’ he asks.

‘He was very… accommodating,’ Will says, and Jack narrows his eyes at him. Will can all but *hear* the thought.

Of course he was; he was an Alpha, and you’re an unbonded Omega. He’d do anything you asked, especially for the chance to get you alone with him.

Hannibal fights down a growl at the assumption written all over Jack’s face, shifting his weight to be subtly closer to Will.

Out loud, Jack says,

‘Georgia Madchen followed you *here*, and while you’re ticking away in the MRI, she does *this* to your doctor… Why him?’

‘She can’t see faces,’ Will replies. ‘Maybe he treated her at some point? Maybe she was angry about it… I dunno… Maybe she thought *he* was *me*.’

‘Alright; while we’re at it… Why *you*?’ Jack says, and Will has to turn away, has to stretch out the tightness making his back and shoulders hurt.

‘I don’t know,’ he says, shoving himself to his feet. ‘I have a habit of collecting *strays*.’ He starts to pace, scrubbing the back of his hair, wishing he could give his crest a squeeze to relax himself. Wishing he could hide in Hannibal’s arms. ‘I- I told her… *Tried* to tell her the night I saw her… I tried to tell her she was alive… Maybe she heard me.’ He pauses, and then grimaces at Jack. ‘Maybe that thought hadn’t *occurred* to her in a while.’

He shrugs, wishing he could add that she may have listened to him because he’s a fellow Omega; someone she could trust in spite of everything… Someone who *understood* her…

Silence settles for a moment, and Will feels himself listing closer to Hannibal, before there’s a loud rustle of paper. Zeller is flicking through a pamphlet for services provided by the Omega clinic as he waits for Jimmy to finish bagging up samples.

‘Huh… Warm massages , *sensory* manipulation, hydrotherapy, *mud baths*… Man, I wish *I* was an Omega. We Betas don’t get *any* of this stuff.’

‘You’d have to give up most of your fundamental human rights to get it,’ Price replies, sealing his final evidence bag. ‘Personally, I prefer the freedom to do whatever job I want and the ability to vote.’

Will can feel Hannibal’s eyes on him, and the shaking starts again. He needs to leave; needs to be alone with his Alpha.

‘Are we done, Jack?’ he asks, his voice quivering. ‘I’m, er, I’m really tired.’

‘Yeah,’ Jack replies softly, noting the shadows under the Omega’s eyes, the tightness of his jaw and the tremble in his hands. ‘Yeah, sure; get some rest.’ He looks at Hannibal. ‘Dr Lecter, would you mind driving him home?’

‘Of course,’ Hannibal replies, inclining his head to Jack and then touching Will’s elbow. ‘Shall we?’

Will hums, and he follows his Alpha from the room, keeping step behind him as officers step aside for Hannibal.

They don’t touch or speak until they are alone in the elevator, but as soon as the doors ping shut, Hannibal twines his fingers with Will’s and pulls him up against his body, nuzzling his hairline before kissing him.

‘I’m sorry,’ Will murmurs, brushing the words across Hannibal’s lips. ‘Are you okay? He was your friend.’

‘It’s a shock,’ Hannibal replies, cradling the back of Will’s head and holding him close enough that they can share breath. ‘But I have to take care of you.’

Will stiffens, and Hannibal is careful not to react when he pulls away with a scowl.

‘You *don’t*,’ the Omega replies. ‘I’m not the one who lost someone…’

‘I’m your Alpha,’ Hannibal reasons, and Will reacts just as expected. Hannibal sees him visibly swallow as he squashes down the cramp in his gut, sees him square his shoulders in defiance of his biology. Of his *need* to be physically close to Hannibal this close to heat.

‘My car is here,’ Will says firmly. ‘I’m going to my house and I’m staying there, *alone*, tonight. You need to focus on yourself. Grieve for your friend.’

‘Will…’ Hannibal adds a sound of hesitation to his voice, and Will kisses him again, pushing him back against the side of the elevator as he devours his mouth.

‘*Stop* trying to *protect* me, Dr Lecter,’ he growls, blisteringly hot breath puffing over Hannibal’s face when he pulls back. ‘I’m *fine*.’

‘You never fail to amaze me, Will.’ Hannibal cups each side of his Omega’s face, staring into the gold-ringed irises and wide pupils. As dampened as Will’s scent is, this close to him Hannibal can smell the first hint of his heat aroma – a spicy, earthy aftertaste to his sweet musk.

All he wants to do is take Will home and wait with him until the heat hits, but he needs him to be alone. After all, this diseased Omega-killer has taken an interest in him, and is likely to attack tonight.

Hannibal strokes Will’s hair one last time before they step out of the elevator. He walks Will to his car and holds the door open for him, checking that they are alone before leaning in for one final, lingering kiss.

Take her life, Will. She’s more innocent than Garrett Jacob Hobbs… Her death will set you free.

***

The further from Baltimore he gets, the worse he feels. Will clenches his hands on the steering wheel, gritting his teeth against the headache pounding behind his eyes, the sickness in his belly and spasms deep inside as his body tries to tighten around nothing.

I’m fine… I’ll be fine…it’s just for a night…

It’s already late, so he feeds the dogs as soon as he gets in and then lets them out while he changes into a t-shirt and pajama trousers. His eyelids are heavy and the sockets are gritty; Will cracks his jaw with a yawn as he snuggles up in his nest, bunching a pillow behind him to imitate Hannibal’s body.

The dogs are in their beds by the fireplace. Will layers sheets and blankets over him, his nose buried in Hannibal's pillow. He needs his Alpha to sleep here again soon; his scent is faded, and Will shivers with the feeling that he's being watched. It's not comforting this time; and he's surprised when he wakes up a while later, because he hadn't expected to fall asleep.

Why *is* he awake? He frowns as he comes back to consciousness. Realizes that Underbite is growling, creeping closer but staying low to the ground with fear, her tail tucked between her legs. Winston and Buster are tense, and even Rudy is rumbling deep in his throat.

A sweet, rotten scent wafts up to him and Will's stomach twists. Fear snatches his breath and his ears ring with the effort of trying to *hear* past the thud of his heart.

She's here… She's under my bed…

Trembling, his skin shiny with sweat, Will very slowly leans over, looking down past the edge of his mattress…

A dirty, bruised face stares back at him, glowing amber eyes widening in surprise as Will throws himself out of bed. He lands on his front, scrabbling to get his feet under him in case he needs to run or fight, and feels his own eyes flood gold as her *fear* and pain wash over him. She's exhausted, and confused, curled up underneath his bed, her thoughts like sludge in her brain.

'I see you, Georgia,' Will says, staring hard at her face, trying to push the knowledge into her. 'Think of who you *are*.' He glances at the clock and then says, 'It's midnight. You're in Wolf Trap, Virginia. Your name is Georgia *Madchen*. You're not alone. We are here *together*.'

The other Omega trembles, rubbing the soft fleece of her cardigan against her cheek, and a tear trickles across her nose as she whispers,

'Am I *alive*?'

She extends her arm, fingers stretched and reaching for Will, and her desperation makes his chest too tight to breathe.

Will reaches for her, stretching out across the cold floor, across the emptiness between them, and brushes his fingertips against hers. An unspoken promise; a connection in the darkness that makes his body pulse with warmth.

You're alive. I see you. I'm here for you.

***

'She'll recover?' Jack asks, waiting in front of Dr Lecter's desk the next day. Will is at the Omega Care Unit with Georgia, having accompanied her in the ambulance from his house the night before. He is refusing to leave until he knows she's safe, so Jack wants to let him know as soon as possible, so he can keep his distance from her.

'Risk of infection is high,' Hannibal replies, flicking through the notes in Georgia's patient file. 'She's lost most of the vital fluids. Even some bone mass. She's being treated like a burn

victim.'

'But she'll recover mentally?' Jack asks.

'She has Cotard's syndrome,' Hannibal says, ignoring the other Alpha's aggressive stance and the flicker of red in his eyes. 'Almost all sufferers of this delusion recover with treatment. In extreme cases, like this one, electroconvulsive therapy. Of course, there's also the psychological trauma of losing her Alpha, when she remembers.'

'Her Alpha, who she *killed*,' Jack growls, and Hannibal nods. He looks to the side, clasping his hands so as not to fiddle with anything.

'I'm more concerned about Will,' he says.

'I thought you'd be more concerned about your colleague, Dr Sutcliffe,' Jack replies, adjusting his weight and glancing at the file in his hands.

'I am grieving Dr Sutcliffe,' Hannibal says. He looks sad. 'But Will is very much alive. He's still desperate for an explanation that can make everything right again.'

'I'm, er, pretty desperate for some explanations myself,' Jack agrees. 'Really wanna talk to this Omega when she comes to.' He glances down, pauses and then looks at Hannibal. 'How much do you think she'll remember?'

Hannibal sets his hands flat on his desk and then gets to his feet, smoothing out his suit jacket as he stands.

'I sincerely hope, for her sake, she doesn't remember much,' he replies, leaning over to switch off his lamp.

He thinks back to the night he murdered Dr Sutcliffe. Will had been so pliant, lost to prodrome as he lay in the MRI, oblivious to the screams down the hall. Georgia had come into the office as Hannibal had been sawing open Sutcliffe's face, and he'd had to improvise. He'd handed *her* the scissors, knowing she couldn't see his face. Or, at least, not clearly.

But all memory could be recovered, and Georgia might identify Sutcliffe's killer with enough treatment. Not worth the risk, no matter how attached Will had become to her.

If only he had killed you, Hannibal thinks. *Then I wouldn't have to.*

Rôti

Chapter Summary

Will’s heat finally hits, but the intermittent cycles drive his temperature dangerously high. Determined to take advantage of Will’s altered consciousness, Hannibal ignores the warning signs and sets a trap to lure his Omega into killing Dr Gideon, who has escaped custody and is targeting the psychiatrists who attempted to treat him.

Chapter Notes

*** I'm so sorry about the mix-up between Chilton and Gideon... NO CLUE what my brain was doing there, and I missed it in every single read-through! Thanks to my amazing readers for pointing it out. All fixed! ***

Oh my goodness! This chapter was DIFFICULT to write! I really hope you enjoy; please let me know how you think I did capturing Will's heat and the problems caused by Hannibal's manipulations...

As always, thank you SO MUCH for all the amazing comments and kudos - you're all fantastic, and you make me LIVE for posting new chapters.

On to Chapter 12! Ooh, it's getting really exciting now, peeps...

ELEVEN

Rôti

Knowing that Abel Gideon is suing Frederick Chilton for manipulating him to believing he is the Chesapeake Ripper is *delicious*. Hannibal can barely keep the smile from his face when he hosts his fellow psychiatrist that Friday evening, and he cannot resist the urge to point out how foolish Chilton has been.

‘Someone who already doubts their own identity can be more susceptible to manipulation,’ he says, leading Frederick into the dining room. ‘Dr Gideon is a psychopath. Psychopaths are narcissists.’ He chuckles. ‘They *rarely* doubt who they are.’

‘I tried to *appeal* to his narcissism,’ Frederick says; his latest excuse. Hannibal busies himself stirring curry so as not to risk a flash of red in his eye as he replies,

‘By convincing him he was the Chesapeake Ripper.’

Frederick sighs, and turns to look at the snow falling outside the window.

‘If only I had been more curious about the common mind…’

‘I have *no* interest in understanding sheep,’ Hannibal replies, carefully spooning sauce and meat onto his guest’s plate. ‘Only eating them. Kudal.’ He steps back, holding Frederick’s chair out for him. ‘A South Indian curry. Made from sheep, of course.’ He grins as Frederick sits, and takes the serving dish to his own plate. ‘Bathed in a coconut-coriander chili sauce.’

‘It feels like a last supper,’ Frederick whines, and Hannibal smiles.

‘You’re not the only psychiatrist accused by a patient of making them kill. Poke around a psychopath’s mind… bound to get poked back.’ He thinks of Will, of the work he’s doing with him, and he wonders what will happen when his mate pokes back.

Frederick huffs again as Hannibal sits and takes a bite of his own curry.

‘What would *you* do in my position?’ the smaller Alpha asks, perfectly groomed eyebrows fixed into a plaintive expression.

‘Deny everything,’ Hannibal says, his eyes gleaming when he looks up. Another sigh. Frederick rolls his eyes.

‘I thought psychic driving would’ve been more effective in breaking down his personality,’ he admits. Hannibal nods, smoothing more kudal onto his fork.

‘Psychic driving fails because its methods are too obvious,’ he says. ‘You were trying too hard, Frederick. If force is used, the subject will only surrender temporarily. Once a patient is exposed to the method of manipulation, it becomes *much* less effective.’

I should know; my psychic driving of Will is exquisitely subtle; it won’t be long before he truly understands what he’s capable of.

Frederick nods thoughtfully, chewing his tongue before he speaks.

‘When Dr Gideon began to suspect he was being pushed –’

‘He pushed back,’ Hannibal says, picking up his beer. ‘The subject *mustn’t* be aware of *any* influence.’

No hint of nervousness, no doubt in my mind that this is the right thing for him.

He thinks of how *close* they are to freeing his Omega’s shadow, his darkness… But his mate is clever… *So* clever… Hannibal is certain he’ll work it out, sooner or later…

And when he does… It will be magnificent.

‘When is the hearing?’ he asks, setting his glass back down and scooping rice onto his fork.

Frederick speaks before he finishes chewing.

‘Mm… Tuesday. He’s being transferred on Monday.’ He scoffs, wiping his mouth with his napkin and taking a gulp of his own beer. ‘It’s *absurd* that a judge even *agreed* to it.’

‘Gideon’s lawyer made quite a compelling case,’ Hannibal replies, stinging Frederick with his words. His barb sticks and he sees panic flare on the other man’s face; a sheen of sweat on his forehead. ‘He could win, Frederick.’

Hiding a smile behind another bite of curry, he decides to let the other Alpha wallow in self-pity for a while. As entertaining as this evening is, his mind is preoccupied with Will. In their session yesterday, his Omega had been distracted, slipping into prodrome every few minutes. Will had forgotten to wear his Beta spray and use his Inhibitor drops; Hannibal had noted the bright gold around his irises – a warning of his imminent heat. His scent had been thick and sweet, lingering with traces of spice…

‘Nobody’s going to take the word of a convicted psychopath.’ Frederick’s words are a bluff; even a *child* could detect the quiver in his voice.

‘What if they do?’ Hannibal asks, dragging himself from trying to feel his mate’s emotions. This early in their bond, at this distance, the impression is faint, but Hannibal can sense irritation and fear… Will is pacing, no doubt, trying to settle in for an evening alone, barely able to withstand the gnawing urge to call his Alpha. To hear Hannibal’s voice. ‘You should prepare yourself.’

‘Well…’ Frederick tries to laugh, though his throat bobs with a gulp and his mouth twists unpleasantly. ‘I stand by my testimony; Gideon told *me* that he was the Ripper. He was *adamant*.’

‘He claims you manipulated him,’ Hannibal points out, and Frederick’s eyes flicker red.

‘An idea planted by Alana *Bloom*,’ he snarls. ‘Gideon questioned *nothing* until *she* and her *teacher* came along.’ He smirks. ‘Her very *Omegan* teacher. Perhaps I should add *that* to my report. After all, it could have influenced Gideon; he is an Alpha, after all.’

Hannibal grows still, controlling the sudden rage filling his lungs with black smoke. Forcing himself to take another bite of kudal, he waits until he’s swallowed to say lightly,

‘Omegan teacher?

‘Hm, yes.’ Frederick smiles. ‘*Will Graham*. *Quite* the case study.’ He tilts his head at Hannibal, dark eyes glinting. ‘But *you* know that, don’t you? After all, you’ve got your claws *deep* inside him.’

Be careful, Frederick… Hannibal schools his face to neutrality.

‘I am Will’s therapist, yes,’ he says. He strokes the handle of his knife with one finger. ‘Though, as far as record states, Will is nothing more than a Beta with an empathy disorder.’ He sighs, feigning concern. ‘*Don’t* let yourself become distracted from Gideon’s accusations, Frederick. You need to focus on *your* patient; not mine.’ Speaking a chunk of meat from the curry, Hannibal lifts it to the light and grins. ‘After all; one can *never* be too careful when it comes to the Chesapeake Ripper.’

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The dogs whine as Will staggers to the toilet to throw up again. Buster and Rudy creep forwards when he sinks to his knees beside the basin, and Will gropes behind him to soothe them. He rests his burning forehead against the seat lid, trying to *think* through the pain blinding him, groaning at the way the room tilts and spins around him, making his stomach roil. His white t-shirt is soaked through and his pajama trousers cling to the backs of his thighs. Even his *kidneys* hurt. The pain is so sharp it snatches his breath, bringing tears to his eyes, and his legs shake when he tries to get up.

He crawls to the sink and splashes cold water over his face. Shivers as if he’s cold but he’s not; he’s burning up. His teeth sting and Will realizes he’s clenching his jaw hard enough to make his ears ring.

What’s happening to me?

He can’t stop the whimpers from bubbling up his sore throat, and Will winds his fingers in Winston’s thick fur, holding on tight as the collie cross pushes the other dogs aside to stand beside him.

Hannibal… He needs Hannibal… He needs help.

Bracing himself against the bath, Will manages to get to his feet and stumbles his way to the bed. He falls onto it, grinding his head down into his pillow as his head explodes from the movement. Nausea swells again but he fights it down, his lips pressed into a thin line because he can’t face getting back up. He lies flat on his back, feeling waves of heat run down his spine, waiting for it to die down.

In for three. Out for five.

Will breathes slowly, trying to control the pain. It takes several minutes for him to be able to fumble on the bedside table for his cell phone, and he winces when he cracks an eye open to squint at the blurred screen. Manages to select Hannibal’s number and stabs at the green icon to call him.

His Alpha answers after three rings.

‘Hello, Will.’

‘Hannibal.’

Washing dishes in his kitchen, Hannibal pauses when he hears how hoarse Will's voice is. His Omega's scent glands have swollen, compressing his vocal chords. He concentrates, sensing his mate's emotions, and feels a flicker of fear and arousal.

It's starting. Will's heat has finally hit. He needs Hannibal *now*. Knowing him as he does, Hannibal estimates that his Omega has been feverish for a few hours, which means he'll have slipped into his final prodrome before Hannibal can get out to Wolf Trap. The heat fever itself will likely spike in the night, and *then*…

You're lucky I bonded you when I did.

Propping the phone between his jaw and shoulder, Hannibal dries his hands off on his apron.

'I'm on my way, Will.'

His Alpha's voice slips like molten gold into his chest, filling his heart and then flooding his body with pleasure every time it beats. Will moans, sweat beading on his brow and running like tears down his cheeks. He's so *hard*, aching to be touched and *so* empty…

'*Hannibal…'*

'I know,' Hannibal murmurs, striding through the house to get his bag and coat from the entrance hall. He's been packed for days, now, expecting to spend the isolation period at Will's house. 'I'll call you back. I'm coming to you now.'

'*Alpha*.' Will's voice breaks and he whines, the sound of it raising the fine hairs on the back of Hannibal's neck. It's a desperate call to mate and Hannibal feels it in his balls, making his eyes itch as the irises flare rut-red. He purrs, an instinctive effort to soothe his mate, and wrenches open the front door before he's even hung up. Drops the house phone and pulls his cell from his pocket, dialing Will's number immediately. Too soon; it clicks to voicemail.

'Will Graham. Leave a message.'

Hannibal snarls, hurrying to lock the house behind him. He can feel himself getting lost in his hormones; adrenaline and testosterone pumping through him, preparing him to chase, to fight, to kill. To fuck. Giving him the strength and stamina to satisfy and protect his Omega in the days to come. He hadn't expected it to affect him so strongly.

Forcing himself to walk to his Bentley, Hannibal takes a deep breath to calm his body. He needs to remain in control of this situation; he can't afford to make a mistake now, not when they are so close to freeing Will's shadow.

He sits down behind the wheel, placing his bag on the seat beside him, and watches in the rearview mirror as his eyes fade from crimson to burgundy. Better.

His cell rings and he makes himself wait until the second buzz to answer.

'Will.'

‘It *hurts*,’ Will whimpers, and Hannibal puts him on speaker as he starts the engine. He can imagine how Will must feel; stripped and raw, as helpless as a newborn without its mother. Omegas in heat are at their most vulnerable; without their Alpha to protect them, anyone can mate with them and there’s *nothing* they can do about it. If they’re alone, there’s the risk of dehydration from the fever, and some even succumb to shock from the pain of their bodies seeking a relief they can’t give themselves.

When they go into heat *with* an Alpha… Hannibal grins. His very *scent* will send Will spinning into orgasm. His touch and voice will soothe him *and* drive him crazy with desire; an endless need to mate, to take everything Hannibal can give him. To beg for his seed until there’s a child in him. Will is going to be an animal; vicious and instinctual. Beautiful and deadly and *all his*.

‘Listen to my voice,’ Hannibal says, and he hears Will purr, the sound interspersed with desperate mewls. ‘That’s it; I’m here. I’m on my way to you now.’

‘I don’t feel well,’ Will moans, rolling onto his side and hunching up to protect his tender stomach. He wipes his face and rubs his eyelids, trying to crush the ache beneath. ‘My head hurts.’

Concern licks at Hannibal’s belly for a moment, but he was expecting this… It’s the inflammation; it just needs time to settle. Soon, most of Will’s pain will move to his abdomen, relieved only when Hannibal is inside him.

‘Are you experiencing any cramps, Will?’ he asks, pulling onto the interstate out to Virginia.

‘My kidneys,’ Will gasps, doubling over as a fresh bout of pain chills him to the bone. ‘Oh *God*… Hannibal…’

‘It’s alright, Will. Just breathe.’ Hannibal checks his mirrors and then puts his foot down. No doubt Will’s body is simply adjusting to a heat for the first time in five years, but he doesn’t like the idea of him alone in the middle of Wolf Trap with these symptoms.

You’re strong, Will. You can survive this.

‘I’m really hot,’ Will manages. ‘And my throat’s…’ He pants, clenching his hands into the sheets as he rides out the spasms wracking him. ‘*Fuck*... Hannibal…’

Fire burns him. He shoves onto his back, grinding his hips down as slick pours out of him. No… *No*... He remembers this… He knows what this is… But he can’t *think*. He can’t… His thoughts are jumbled…

‘Hannibal...’

‘I’m coming, Will.’

Fuck… No… Will grabs at his head, bucking up as white fire crackles across his skin. He’s hard, *aching* and heavy, struggling for air.

‘Hannibal, is this… Am I…?’

‘*Relax*, Will. Just let go,’ Hannibal replies, raising his voice to cut through Will’s panic. ‘Don’t fight it.’

‘*No*…’ Will arches his spine from the bed, his skin steaming in the cool air. ‘I don’t *want* it!’

‘*Listen* to my voice, Will. Focus on me; I’ll help you through this.’

‘I don’t want it,’ Will whispers, his tear-damp cheek slipping against the phone screen. He can feel himself fading into darkness, falling into the warm current… ‘I don’t *want* it…’

Black and gold sparks fly around him and he groans again, scrabbling to hold onto himself.

‘Let go, Will. Just let go; you’ll feel better soon.’

‘*Hannibal…*’

The bed goes out from under him. Will sees the world tilt, feels himself falling, and then…

Am I dreaming?

Fear flickers inside him, and Will comes back to himself slowly. It’s late… It *feels* late… And endless… He’s drifting towards a wall of ice. It cracks, a rumble of thunder from deep inside the glacier. But it’s *hot*. Everything’s *so* hot…

How can ice be hot? He just wants a *whisper* of cool… Just a *hint*… But there’s no relief. There’s no *air*…

He’s melting… Breaking apart as fire turns his blood to ash…

Will pulls his glasses off, staring at the totem pole of bodies in the sand. He’s on the beach in Grafton, West Virginia… He can hear his heartbeat; a dark pulse in his chest. *Thud… thud-thud…*

A fissure splits the ice. The sound tears through him, slicing his skull in half, punching deep into his gut and wrenching his insides out.

Hannibal… It’s coming… It’s coming *now*…

He wants to run. Wants to escape… Wants to hide until it’s over but his muscles are locked in place. Rigid and trembling, Will fights to keep the dam from breaking.

The glacier ruptures. *No…*

It’s breaking. Falling… Smashing apart. Slow at first, and then faster and faster…

Inevitable.

It’s bearing down on him. Thundering towards him, ready to crush him… Bury him alive, and there’s *nothing* he can do about it…

Thud… thud-thud…

The tide sucks out, for miles and *miles*… There's emptiness… *So* much emptiness…

Hannibal… Hannibal… Alpha…

A tidal wave rears over him, racing towards him at a hundred miles an hour, ready to tear him apart and consume him…

And then it's *on* him. Will tries to yell, tries to run, but it's crashing into the totem pole, flinging rotting bodies at him. Rips the breath from his lungs, scalding his skin as he's washed away into *nothing* –

He wakes with a jerk, drenched in sweat, gasping for breath in the middle of his bed. His t-shirt sticks like a second skin. His tongue is too big for his mouth. His throat hurts; it's swollen and aching. When he bears down, pushing slick from his body, tears mingle with the sweat on his cheeks at the *pain* the emptiness causes him; muscles cramping around *nothing*.

Just a dream… It was all just a dream…

But he can't *breathe*. He can't *think*. Will forces his head to the side, looking for his mate, and everything swims. He can't… He doesn't *understand*… What's *happening* to him? Where's Hannibal? He should be here… He *needs* him…

The clock shimmers. It's… It's *dissolving* into water that runs off his side table…

The bed is sopping wet. Will rolls his head again, trying to find Hannibal, to wake him because he needs him. He's *so* wet, so slick, *so* hot… *So* empty, *so* alone…

He's fading. Nothing but heat and water and tears and *pain*, washed away from existence…

Will tosses, grabbing at his head as pain explodes between his temples. Water splashes. Steam swirls above him. He's dissolving… just like the clock… *Melting*… And then –

'Hannibal!'

Will wakes again, sucking in a lungful of boiling air, his naked body shining with slick and sweat. The dogs are whimpering again, pacing around the bed. Rudy licks at his bare arm, but the roughness of his tongue is too much against his stinging flesh and Will flinches away. He can't… He *can't*…

'Will.'

The sound of Hannibal's voice slams into him and Will turns. A thousand volts set his nerves alight and the *relief* is so sudden and so sweet it makes him cry. Makes white crash behind his eyes as he comes just from the *sound* and sight and smell of his Alpha, spilling pearly white across his belly before he throws himself at the other man. He's shaking hard enough to make his teeth chatter, and he whimpers, kissing him as best he can.

He sucks up Hannibal's scent, moaning at *good* it feels to have him in his arms, and he's scrambling to climb on top of him before he even knows what he's doing.

‘Alpha… Alpha, Alpha… *Hannibal*…’

He’s sobbing, rocking down and leaking more slick over Hannibal’s bare thighs as he straddles him. He doesn’t know when Hannibal got here; he doesn’t care. All he cares about is the feel of his Alpha’s silky hair between his fingers; the stubble against his palms when he slides his hands down to grip each side of his face…

Hannibal’s chest hair rasps against his own burning skin… Will trembles at the feel of his Alpha’s hardness, his own length throbbing again as heat flows out from his crest, and then his jaw goes slack as more pleasure shatters him, overwhelming him with how sudden and intense it is.

Hannibal holds him tight as Will comes a second time, spattering their chests with fresh white. It’s *beautiful*… So carnal and *pure*. Will’s eyes are molten gold, not a trace of blue left, his pupils blown wide. The heat pouring from him makes sweat dribble down Hannibal’s back, but he wouldn’t change anything; having Will in his arms like this is perfection.

He reaches down and takes hold of himself, guiding his hardness past the ring of twitching, wet muscle, sinking as deep inside his Omega’s desperate body as he can get. Silky muscles hold him tight, stroking every inch of him, coating and caressing him.

This… Hannibal’s groan turns into a purr and he strokes up and down Will’s damp back, savoring his mate’s sweet, spicy heat scent.

‘*Ohhh*...’ Will’s eyes fly open at the stretch. It’s so good… *So*, *so* good… He tips his head back, baring his throat to his Alpha as he stares, sightless, at the ceiling, rocking on his Alpha’s length. Hannibal’s thick musk fills his lungs and he quivers, hovering on the edge of another climax, baring his teeth as sweat rolls down his face.

‘I’m here,’ Hannibal whispers, reaching up to hold the front of Will’s throat in a choke. Before he’s even moved the other hand to the Omega’s crest, Will is coming again, his breath catching at how *sharp* it is, his nails digging into the muscle of Hannibal’s shoulders as he judders.

Hannibal’s races. This is far more intense than he’d expected. Will’s body clenches up around him, pulling him impossibly deep, and the smell and sound of his mate’s pleasure is almost more than he can bear.

He pushes up and turns Will, shoving him onto his back so that he can lie on top of him, his eyes glowing red as he snarls into his Omega’s face.

‘*Mine*.’

‘*Yours!*’ Will grabs Hannibal close, scratching bloody trails across his cheeks as he grabs at his face to pull him in for a bruising kiss. Teeth catch and they both taste blood, smearing it across their lips and cheeks.

Hannibal hooks Will’s legs over his elbows and snaps his hips, slamming into his Omega’s scalding body. The force of it lifts Will from the bed as he takes him, brutally hard. Their

purrs mingle with gasps and groans. The bed bangs against the wall and Will cries out again, calling for Hannibal to fill him with his seed and knot him.

And Hannibal can't *help* but come, climax tearing at him until he's pouring all of himself into his mate, *throbbing* as Will's body tightens around his knot, the Omega convulsing as another orgasm rips him apart.

'*Hannibal…*'

Will purrs, nuzzling and kissing at Hannibal's cheeks, hands moving constantly, stroking every part of his Alpha's body he can reach. He keeps rocking and squeezing, drawing a long, low groan from Hannibal, keening when Hannibal moves again, pulling against his tender body.

'*Yesss*… Yes, Alpha… Yours… Yours, yours…'

Hannibal lifts up, breaking Will's grip on him. He knocks the smaller man's arms and legs aside when Will growls and comes for him again, gripping his Omega's hips hard enough to leave bruises. Holds him up off the bed and watches as Will submits, crossing his arms at the wrist and rolling his head back to bare his throat, tucking his knees up to display himself, completely open and vulnerable.

Total surrender. His Omega isn't aware enough to feel self-conscious; he's acting on pure instinct, using everything he can think of to drive his Alpha to rut.

'*Alpha*…'

'You're *mine*, Will.' Hannibal clenches his teeth at the sharpness of the pleasure as he rocks his knot inside him, chasing the waves of climax threatening to break him.

'Yours,' Will gasps, shaking at how *good*, how *right* it feels to have Hannibal so far inside him, stretching and filling him. 'All yours…'

Hannibal snaps his hips again, jerking at the sensation, and loses his breath. He drops Will's hips so he can brace himself on the bed and feels his Omega lock his arms and legs tight around him, teeth brushing over his ear as Will chants his name like a prayer, squeezing him tight and working him with his tight, pulsing muscles.

So hot… He's so hot… Red chases gold chases white, all of it tumbling into endless black as Will comes again. His muscles spasm, sending him spinning into pure, endless pleasure. He's *owned*, so thoroughly *Hannibal's* and it's all that matters.

'I'm yours,' he whispers, sobbing into his Alpha's shoulder as the pleasure spikes again. There's no end to it; he can't make it stop. 'Please… *Please*, Hannibal, please…'

'I'm here, Will.' Hannibal's voice is choked, and the Alpha pants against his neck as he pumps another dribble of seed inside him, his knot swelling painfully inside him. But it's still not enough, it's not what he *needs*, what he's built for, and Will can't stop whimpering for him, can't stop calling for him.

‘Sssh…’ Hannibal cups the back of Will’s neck, squeezing tight to soothe him, control him; make him pliant. Will cries again, eyes blank, his body frozen even as his heart races in his chest. ‘Easy, Will… I’ve got you.’

‘Ha-Hannibal…’ Will’s throat closes around his voice as Hannibal adjusts his grip, pinching the middle crest tight. He can’t speak; can’t move… He can’t do *anything* but *feel*… He stares up into Hannibal’s face as his Alpha looks down at him. He’s drowning in molten, starving eyes, in the bright red ringing dark brown…

You like watching me suffer...

Pleasure chases pain through his body as Hannibal continues to hold him in position, not allowing him to milk more seed or a larger knot from him. As soothing as the purrs and kisses are, Will can’t stop the tears from falling, and he feels like screaming when his Alpha’s knot finally goes down and Hannibal slips free. His abdomen pulses with fire and sweat pours from his skin as his cramping muscles push fresh slick out of him. As soon as Hannibal releases his crest, Will tries to reach for him again, sobbing as his Alpha flips him onto his front and pins him with a strong hand between his shoulder blades.

‘*Hannibal*… God; Hannibal, *please!*’

‘Mmm, begging suits you, Will.’ Hannibal rests his lips *so* lightly on Will’s spine, feathering kisses down his back, buying himself time to get hard again. ‘Hold still.’

Will’s breath hitches when he realizes what the other man plans to do. Sweat trickles down his forehead at the first brush of Hannibal’s tongue at the top of his ass, and he spreads his thighs as wide as they’ll go, burying his face in the musky sheets when his Alpha kisses the pulsing, twitching ring of muscle.

‘*Alpha…*’

‘Are you going to beg me, Will?’ Hannibal purrs, tickling the inside of Will’s thighs, giving his balls a warning tap when Will tries to squirm away. ‘*Hold* still.’

‘*Fuck*… Hannibal!’ Will freezes, biting his lip when Hannibal tickles him again. He moans at the feel of lips and tongue gathering up the syrupy slick spilling out of him, whimpering when Hannibal’s tongue pushes *inside*. He can’t… He *can’t* not obey. ‘Please,’ he whispers. ‘H-Hannibal… *Please*…’

‘Please?’ Hannibal places a wet kiss onto Will’s quivering buttock, reaching between his legs to hold him tight and keep him from orgasm. ‘Please, what?’

Will groans, his body jerking against the restraint. He shoves back against Hannibal’s hardness, trying to force him, and Hannibal squeezes until it hurts. Will flinches, hissing through his teeth.

‘Please *fuck* me,’ he growls, rocking into Hannibal’s punishing grip. ‘*Please*.’

‘Why are you fighting me, Will?’ Hannibal chuckles at Will’s snarl, stroking him hard and fast and then gripping again, keeping him at the edge. Another shudder runs through Will and he cries, lowering his cheek to the sheets so he can wrap his arms around his throbbing belly.

‘*Please*,’ he gasps, wincing when sweat stings his crest. ‘Hannibal, *please*. I *need* you. In… please, *please*, in. I’ll do anything… Please…’

‘Good, Will.’ Hannibal releases him as he rubs tingling slick onto his growing hardness. Lines himself up and then he’s pushing back inside Will’s body where he belongs. He holds his breath, his heart battering his ribcage at the sudden rush of heat and the gripping muscles. Will comes hard, convulsing around his Alpha, squeezing his eyes tight shut against the grey spots swarming his vision. He can’t remember how to breathe, how to *exist*. He’s white fire and heat and water running over him, *through* him. He’s Hannibal; he’s *his* Omega, his other half, his mate, his fledgling monster…

I love you.

Slamming back against Hannibal’s pumping hips, Will manages to get his arms up next to his head so he can push harder, taking him deeper, filling his body until it hurts. Sweat drips from his hair, from his face; runs down his arms and legs. He can see his breath rippling in front of his mouth and he imagines his crest glowing.

‘Bite me,’ he snarls, scrabbling behind him for Hannibal. Feels the taller man bow over his back and then strong arms wrap around him, pulling him so he’s kneeling up against a broad chest. Soft lips brush his crest, wracking him with another orgasm, so sudden he doesn’t even have time to make a sound, and then Hannibal’s teeth are sinking into the ridges.

Pain and pleasure shatter him. Everything narrows to the sensations in his body; the rub inside him, the blood spilling over his skin, the hands spread flat over his heaving chest, supporting him. Will knows he’s nothing but light and air and color; gold and ivory slashed with red… Fine china split apart and spilling out endless black.

Alive. *This is what it is to be alive*.

Hannibal dips his head to savor the coppery tang of Will’s crest blood mingling with his sweet musk. It rises like a wood fire between them, rich and smoky. He smells wild.

Releasing the torn flesh, Hannibal licks up the crimson rivulets, smearing it across Will’s shoulder blades.

‘Blood suits you,’ he whispers, brushing his lips across Will’s ear as he speaks, slowing his thrusts, going deep and hard. Will whimpers, winding an arm up around Hannibal’s neck, holding him close. He purrs, shuddering at another, smaller climax. They’re coming in waves now and he has nothing left to give, but his body continues to suck Hannibal in deeper, enticing him to spill his precious seed and knot him. He rolls his hips down, fucking himself on the Alpha’s re-swelling knot.

Hannibal groans, hugging Will tight as he rides out the pleasure building, overtaking him again. His Omega is so *good* at that. He knows *just* how to move his body; how to pull and

push to coax a long, brutal orgasm from his Alpha, and Hannibal comes hard, thrusting two, three more times inside his mate's tight, pulsing body and then trapping them together, his knot tender and aching from the rut.

'*Will…*'

He falls forwards, panting red flecks against Will's shoulder. Squeezes his crest again and guides them both down into the sheets, pinning Will beneath him. His Omega is still whimpering, but the lock on his crest means he can't move, and Hannibal can catch his breath. He lifts a hand to Will's mouth and lets his Omega suck on two fingers, easing some of his discomfort.

'I've got you, Will,' he whispers, rubbing his cheek back and forth over Will's wet curls. Will purrs, nibbling and licking at his Alpha's fingertips, and Hannibal hums.

It's such a pity you won't remember any of this.

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By the next morning, Hannibal understands why Will resents his heats. As good as it feels, his Omega's constant need for a knot has left him raw, and Hannibal's head pounds from thirst and exhaustion. He groans as sunlight fills the little house, the early morning rays stabbing his retinas.

'Alpha…'

'I'm here, Will.'

The dogs gather around the bed, whining and wagging their tails. They're hungry, and they need to go outside. Will would be heartbroken if he came back to himself after his first heat with his Alpha to find his pets neglected or dead…

Hannibal sighs, and rolls onto his back. The movement pulls him out of Will's body, and the Omega's cry makes one of the dogs bark. Will comes after him, straddling his hips, clumsy fingers reaching for him, trying to push him back inside.

'No! *No!* In! I need you *in!*'

'Stop!' Hannibal grabs Will by the front of his throat and sits up. Will whines, moving back and forth in an attempt to entice Hannibal to hardness again, rather than force him. 'I'm *here*, Will. Take a breath; smell me. I'm *here*.'

Will obeys, inhaling Hannibal's scent, shaking with pleasure. He rubs his hands over Hannibal's chest and shoulders, his lips parted to taste his Alpha on the roof of his mouth as he squirms.

'Hannibal,' he whispers, his voice cracking from thirst and from how swollen his scent glands are. Hannibal can feel them bulging against his fingers, and, when he withdraws his hand, his skin is coated in Will's sweet, smoky musk.

‘You need to drink, Will.’ Hannibal moves quickly, anticipating Will’s rage at the idea of delaying mating for something as trivial as hydration. He swaps the choke hold for a tight grip on Will’s crest, squeezing the cluster of nerves designed to paralyze him. But now, because he’s not inside him, Will’s eyes fly open in fear and anger.

Hannibal smiles at the *power*, the *control*, he has, and reaches behind him for the medical kit he’d placed on the side table last night. Will had been in prodrome when he’d arrived, giving him time to prepare. He opens the lid and Will’s eyes, the only part of him able to move, flick down to the crest brace inside.

No… no… Hannibal, no…

Seeing the panic in Will’s eyes, smelling the salty fear in his scent, Hannibal purrs. He kisses Will softly, brushing his lips back and forth over his Omega’s unresponsive mouth.

‘It’s alright,’ he murmurs. ‘I’m right here with you.’

Will’s throat catches around a tiny whimper and Hannibal’s darkness rumbles. *Helpless… I can do anything I want to you*. But, for now, what he wants to do is care for his mate, and he strokes Will’s hair gently.

‘You need to drink,’ he repeats. Will stares at him, his breath catching, and Hannibal growls at his urge to give in to him. He suppresses it and lifts the supple leather to his Omega’s neck. Will needs water more than comfort.

The crest brace is designed like a collar, with a long metal ring at the back. Bar screws tighten the ring, squeezing it together and changing the pressure on an Omega’s crest to achieve a desired effect. Most are used to help Omegas with childbirth, and commercial crest braces only tighten to the point of releasing endorphins. But Will can see that Hannibal’s is capable of much more than that, and a tear slips down his cheek as his Alpha locks it into place.

Removing his hand, Hannibal tightens the ring until it mimics the same paralyzing, silencing grip on Will’s crest, sitting back to check it’s secure.

‘I know it’s uncomfortable,’ he says, cupping the side of Will’s face and brushing his thumb over his mate’s cheekbone. ‘Trust me, Will; it’s for your own good.’

Please… Please don’t…

Will pours his desperation into his eyes, fear changing to anger as Hannibal positions his pliant body to sit up on the edge of the bed. It’s a strange sensation, being upright but unable to move; one he’s only felt once before – when he was forcibly Gentled following Coby’s attack. He’s like a mannequin; wherever Hannibal puts him, he stays, unable to say anything, to *do* anything to relieve the painful *emptiness* inside him. There’s a gaping hole in his chest, widening as his Alpha gets up and walks *away* from him, and more tears fall, splashing onto the limp hands resting on his thighs.

Hannibal moves quickly, his skin crawling at the pitiful little sounds Will manages to make. The dogs are whining, worried by the Omega's distress, and Hannibal has to snap his fingers twice to make them all go outside. He prepares a large jug of water for the bedside table and collects a couple of protein bars from his bag. Hideous things, but there's no time to prepare anything more elaborate right now.

Returning to the bed, he kneels before Will, hushing him and wiping away the tears from his cheeks. His balls tighten at how *vulnerable* the other man is, and he tilts his head, taking a moment to savor the look of the dark leather against Will's pale skin.

So beautiful…

'You need water.' Kneeling up, he reaches back to fiddle with the brace, releasing a little of the tension from the middle of Will's crest, and peers more closely at his face. 'Can you open your mouth? Can you swallow for me?'

Will blinks slowly, fighting the lethargy in his body. Licks his cracked lips and swallows, whining at how thick his tongue feels.

'*Please*,' he whispers, his voice wobbling. 'Let me *go*.'

'Drink,' Hannibal replies, holding a straw to his Omega's lips.

Will's eyebrows draw together into a furious scowl, but he takes the straw nudging his lips and sucks the cold water down, fighting nausea as his stomach twists. It's not what he *needs*… It's not *Hannibal*…

'Easy,' Hannibal murmurs, pulling the half-drunk glass away. 'Take it slow.'

'It *hurts*,' Will rasps, staring deep into Hannibal's eyes, trying to make him understand. Can't he *see* how *empty* he is? Can't he feel how *wrong* that is? '*Hannibal*… Alpha…'

'Drink.' Hannibal stands, stroking Will's curls as his Omega obeys, finishing the rest of the water. 'Good… That's enough for now.'

He sets the empty glass on the side and leaves again to fetch the dogs. Uncovers the food Will has made for them and scoops it into their feed bowls before returning to the bed.

'Here…' Leaning around Will's shoulder, Hannibal loosens the brace. The *second* he regains control of his own body, Will brings a knee up into his Alpha's groin, shoving him back and coming after him before the collar is even unbuckled.

'Don't *ever*-!' Will breaks off into a snarl, grabbing for him as Hannibal staggers. Gasps when the Alpha recovers and grips his wrist, squeezing until the bones grind. Hannibal wrenches his arm out and then his hand is under his jaw, choking him, walking him backwards until his knees hit the mattress and he's falling, the taller man on top of him.

Pinning his Omega, Hannibal captures Will's mouth in a bruising kiss, still holding him by the throat. He can feel the heat burning Will alive, smell the slick pouring out of him, and *see*

how hard he is; he rocks his hips down, fumbling to help guide himself back into his mate's body.

There… Will's growl turns into a purr as Hannibal pushes inside him again, and he wraps his legs tight around the Alpha's waist, clawing at his shoulders and face so they don't break the kiss.

'*Hannibal*… Hannibal…'

'I've got you, Will.' Hannibal leaves Will's lips to suck a bruise into the soft skin beneath his ear, and the Omega's release scalds the skin of his stomach as Will comes. He groans as the unbelievable *tightness* of Will's body, at how *smooth* it is. Skin slaps against skin and they share panting breath as they move, combing fingers through hair and stroking quivering muscles, smearing sweat and tears across each other as the pleasure climbs, higher and higher, sending them spinning into endless white light, their cries mingling into one moment of *perfect* harmony as they come together.

'I love you, Alpha,' Will whispers, pressing the words into Hannibal's lips, kissing him over and over. 'I love you; I love you.'

'I know,' Hannibal replies, holding both sides of Will's face, blocking out anything that isn't *him* from his Omega's sight. 'I've got you.'

'Hannibal…'

'I'm here,' Hannibal promises, hooking a finger under the leather of the collar and using it to pull Will up for another claiming kiss. 'You're all *mine*, Will.'

'Hannibal…' Will brings a hand up, catching Hannibal's finger as he touches the brace. 'Off… Off?'

'No; I like it on you.' Hannibal ignores Will's whimper, ignores the fear causing more tears to well in his eyes, and reaches around to tighten the lower part of the brace, releasing endorphins into Will's body to soothe him even as he cuts off his ability to tense.

'*Ohhh*...' Will's eyes flutter closed, and his throat loosens around a sob as every muscle relaxes. His hands drop to either side of him, his legs fall open and his brain stops, completely. It's *so*, so good… He's *nothing*... Just *light* and *air*…

Hannibal grins to himself and gathers his pliant Omega into his arms. He sits up, moving back to lean against the wall so that he can have a glass of water and something to eat. Will lies warm and soft against him, glassy-eyed, wracked with wave after wave of climax, nothing left to give but unable to stop. He purrs when Hannibal strokes his hair, and sips some of the water offered to him as Hannibal strokes up and down his spine.

'I should have done this to you last night,' Hannibal murmurs, nuzzling Will's flushed cheek. He holds his Omega's head up so he can look into his eyes, watching the pupils widen and contract with every pulse of pleasure in his unresponsive body. 'How does it feel, Will?'

‘*Hannibal*…’ His Omega’s voice is faint, and so hoarse from the swollen glands it’s barely more than a whisper. He is beyond words, beyond recognition; only saying Hannibal’s name because his Alpha told him to say that instead of *Alpha*. There’s nothing in his mind but bliss.

Hannibal hugs him close as his knot goes down, using his thumbs to wipe fresh tears from Will’s cheeks as his Omega cries at the loss. Will can’t do anything about it, though, and Hannibal tucks him tight to his chest, cradling him until his body is ready to rut again. He can hear the hitching little sobs in Will’s throat as pain cuts through his pleasure, and he hums softly at the idea of keeping him like this for days. *Endless desperation*…

‘*Hannibal*…’

Sensing his Alpha’s thoughts, Will manages to croak out his mate’s name before he peaks again, and he feels Hannibal stir beneath him. Looks into his eyes when Hannibal holds each side of his face and, at the quizzical frown, manages to drag some semblance of himself back to reality enough to whisper,

‘*Please*…’

Hannibal’s lips curve into a smile and he kisses Will’s swollen lips, feeling his Omega try to respond. He twitches at the *strength* in his mate, at his determination, and adjusts Will so that hot slick drips onto him, triggering hardness.

‘My *clever* boy,’ he whispers, sliding his hands over Will’s shining muscles, fisting a hand in his hair and hauling him closer for a brutal kiss as he grips himself and pushes inside again. Releasing the tension from the crest brace, he grabs hold of Will’s throat as his Omega lunges for him, squeezing hard as Will rides him with wild fury.

Grey spots dance in front of his vision as Hannibal chokes the air from him, but Will doesn’t care. He can’t stop; can’t stop chasing the climax climbing just out of reach. As if that one, final peak will allow his body to stop. An endless *maybe this time... Maybe this one*…

Hannibal’s breath leaves him in a snarl as Will bears down around his fresh knot, urging him to come harder and longer, taking in *every* drop of seed in the hopes that this time, *this* time it will stick. He thrusts up, again and again, dropping his hands from his Omega’s throat to scrape bloody welts into his hips as he slams Will down, making him take it all, to hold it safe for him as he spills himself deep inside him.

Mine.

Will falls forwards, losing control of his muscles as black swallows him. He’s coming apart at the seams, mouthing at Hannibal’s neck, only vaguely aware of the crest brace tightening again, locking him in place, and then there’s a ringing in his ears, darkness smothering him in warmth as he slips into the current, as he becomes *nothing*, and he can finally, *finally* rest.

***

To Hannibal’s surprise, Will’s fever breaks shortly after dawn the next day, and he rolls away from him once the Alpha slips free of his body.

Marveling at his mate's innate stubbornness to deny himself a true release, Hannibal unbuckles the crest brace and returns it to the medical kit, safely out of sight. Will doesn't need to know about *that*.

He drapes a silk-lined blanket over his Omega's cooling body, rewarded with a soft purr from his sleeping mate, and then stretches out beside him to get some much-needed rest. This cycle might have been short, but Will's scent is still heavy with heat-hormones, and Hannibal has no doubts that another is due in the next few days. Will's body just needs to work through the final stages of detox and settle into an annual estrus cycle. Nothing to worry about.

Will sleeps for hours, and when he finally wakes, it takes him a while to realize where he is. He groans softly as he comes back to himself, mouth dry and stomach growling with hunger. Pushes Hannibal's hands away when the Alpha automatically reaches down to cup his balls and stroke him, scrubbing the bristles on his face as he blinks fuzzy eyes, trying to work out what day it is.

'Hannibal?'

'Good morning, Will.'

He relaxes at the sound of Hannibal's voice and the feel of a warm, broad chest against his back. Snuggles down into the musky, sex-scented covers and then rolls over, his body aching with the movement.

'W'time is it?' he mumbles, nuzzling up against Hannibal's shoulder, staving off the rising sense of dread because *he can't remember how he got here*.

'It's 10.31am on Sunday,' Hannibal replies, glancing at the clock to confirm. He smells the salty fear in Will's scent and wraps an arm around him, hushing him before his Omega can panic. 'You lost time. What's the last thing you remember?'

Will takes a breath, trying to calm his racing heart. It feels like a trapped animal, ramming itself against the bars of his ribcage, desperate to escape. It's how his mind feels…

'I… I was making food for the dogs… It was Friday, and then…' Will gulps, tasting bile. He starts to shake, and the movement pulls at his overused muscles. '*Ow*… God, why does everything hurt?'

'You were quite aggressive,' Hannibal says, holding up his arm to show off some of his bruises and bites. 'I'm afraid I had to restrain you at one point.'

'I did that to you?' Will grabs for Hannibal, inspecting the scratches and teeth marks. Nausea swirls in his stomach and he flops onto his back, staring up at the ceiling, cold dread chilling him to the bone. 'I'm sorry,' he whispers, shoving at his greasy hair, his temples throbbing. 'I'm so sorry.'

'Don't worry about me, Will.' Hannibal sits up against the wall, draping the blankets over his lap and crosses his long legs at the ankle. 'I can handle myself.'

‘What if it had been someone else?’ Will mutters, and Hannibal’s eyes gleam as he hums a soft agreement. Will growls to himself, at the stupid, irrational urge to *cry*, and he shoves up from the bed, stumbling his way into the bathroom and slamming the door shut behind him.

Hannibal tilts his head, watching him leave with a hungry, feral smile.

How terribly out of control you must feel…

Bracing himself against the bathroom door, Will stares at his reflection in the mirror above the sink. He’s pale and sweaty, with dark circles under bloodshot eyes. He looks ill.

There’s something wrong with me.

He has blood under his nails. After using the toilet, Will scrubs his skin raw under hot water, trying to dig out the unclean feeling infecting him.

I lost time… I hurt Hannibal… I’m dangerous.

Catching glimpses of his mate’s frantic thoughts, Hannibal can barely suppress a purr at how *perfectly* conditioned his Omega is. Months of hard work, but *all* of it worth it as Will begins to realize his true potential. His true power.

It won’t scare you forever, he thinks, rising from the bed and let the dogs out and prepare a late breakfast. *Once you embrace it, you’ll realize how good it feels*.

Midway through whisking eggs, he hears the shower. Smiles at Will’s attempts to ground himself in routine. No doubt his Omega is washing away all traces of sweat, slick and blood from his body; using the cedarwood-scented shampoo, of course. Between heats, he won’t be able to stand harsh chemicals on his skin.

The dogs watch as he prepares an omelet, accompanied by a pot of strong coffee. By the time Will emerges to dress in a soft t-shirt and pajama trousers, Hannibal has already set the table.

‘I could have made something,’ the Omega snaps, scrubbing his hair with a towel as he enters the kitchen. ‘You don’t have to do *everything* for me, Hannibal.’

Ignoring Will’s aggressive tone, Hannibal turns, still naked, and holds out a hand.

‘Come here.’

‘You’ve not showered,’ Will argues, but his bare feet carry him closer to his Alpha. He holds his breath, a suspicious lump forming in his throat as he presses up against Hannibal’s side and dips his head to his Alpha’s chest. Two strong arms come around him, holding him close, and his lungs strain from the effort of holding back a sob.

‘It’s alright,’ Hannibal murmurs, stroking Will’s damp curls. ‘We’ll find the answers; I promise.’

‘I *hurt* you,’ Will whispers, his throat so tight he can barely speak. ‘You’re my Alpha and I *did* that to you.’

‘I’d expect nothing less from you,’ Hannibal replies, and the pride in his voice makes Will glance up at him. As he does, the tears he’s so desperately tried fighting roll down his cheeks, and Hannibal catches them with his thumb, brushing them away from his Omega’s neatly trimmed beard. ‘Come on; you need to eat.’

Will sniffs and nods; too hungry to argue. He takes the warmed plate of food from Hannibal and goes to sit at his little dining table, his mouth watering at the smells carried in the steam rising from the omelet. His senses explode when he takes a bite and he can’t help but moan his appreciation at the flavors packed into the dish, squirming at the hint of slick dampening his ass cheeks because *his Alpha* made this for him.

He demolishes half the omelet before he speaks again.

‘We had sex as well, didn’t we?’

He speaks around his mug of coffee, and glances over in time to see Hannibal pause, a forkful of omelet halfway to his mouth. The other man sighs and sets it down, giving Will his full concentration.

‘You were distressed,’ Hannibal replies, speaking to his plate so as to appear contrite. ‘Seeking comfort… It became sexual, yes.’

Will hums and nods, taking another swig. Picks up his cutlery again and continues eating.

‘That makes sense.’

‘Do you remember calling me?’ Hannibal asks, spearing a cherry tomato to add a pop of tartness to the meal. ‘On Friday evening; you asked me to come over.’

Will abandons the remnants of his dish and sits back with a heavy sigh. He rubs his face, trying to piece together the last forty-eight hours. There’s a vague impression of *something*… Heat… Ice, perhaps? His bedside clock melting…

‘I don’t remember that,’ he mutters. ‘This… Is this the longest I’ve lost time?’

‘So far, yes,’ Hannibal replies, taking a sip of coffee to hide his grimace at Will’s little sound of panic at the idea that this could get worse. ‘You said you were worried; you could feel yourself fading and then you asked to see me. I came straight over.’

‘And I attacked you,’ Will says, his mouth twisting unhappily. He shakes his head, disgusted at himself, and his throat bobs as he swallows. ‘I’d say I need help, but…’ He huffs a bitter laugh, and Hannibal reaches out, taking hold of his hand and holding it on top of the table.

‘I *am* helping you, Will. Trust me.’

Will nods, blue eyes darting back and forth as he bounces his knee. Winston creeps closer and rests his head on Will’s thigh, staring up at him, worried.

‘See?’ Hannibal murmurs, glancing down at the dog. ‘We’re all here for you.’

Will nods again, his gaze drifting to the front door and the snow-laden fields beyond. He can feel his heart in his chest, a steady, endless thump, reminding him that he's still alive. Still a threat.

You're all here for me… I'm just not sure I know who 'me' is anymore…

***

When Jack walks into his lecture hall at the end of his first class on Monday, Will can't help but sigh, because he knows *exactly* what it means. Death. Violence. *Potential*.

The Alpha strides up to his desk, brow furrowed and waves of dark anger rolling from him. Students jump aside, parting before his wrath, and Will can feel himself shrink back, squaring his shoulders defensively.

'Abel Gideon escaped custody during a prison transfer,' Jack says, foregoing pleasantries. 'He attacked and killed an orderly and three correctional officers. We need you at the scene. Now.'

And Will nods, because he knows he has no choice.

You're bedrock, and I'm sand. I go where you take me.

They're at the site of the attack within the hour, and Will tilts his face to the cool breeze, appreciating the flecks of snow on his warm skin. His headache returned last night, and his temperature is hovering at a steady 102.

The violence slices his skin, digging into him and hooking barbs into his eyelids. He *has* to see what happened, no matter how much it hurts…

The current laps around his ankles. Rises higher and higher. Bathes him in warmth… His darkness sings, eager to taste the carnage, and then… *See?*

He's in the van. They're travelling. His hands are shacked before him, looped with chains to his feet. One orderly and an officer…

Don't these people know anything?

Will grins up from beneath deceptively coy eyebrows.

'All I need is one hand free.'

He yanks his thumb down, dislocating it from the socket, and pulls the cuff loose. The officer jumps on him, slamming him back into the metal seat. It *hurts* but he's panting with rut, his eyes glowing red, and these pathetic, *pitiful* fools are Betas. He's an *Alpha*, a purebred, and he's *strong*.

He kicks the orderly square in the chest, cracking ribs and shoving him against the other side of the van. Gets his chain around the man's neck when he comes back and punches the officer in the face, breaking his nose. He needs time… Just a bit of time…

They grab him, hauling him onto the floor. He's on his back, but his leg can move. He kicks up and crushes the guard's head against the ceiling. Kicks him again and feels the satisfying pop of a broken neck. Leaves him to fall, dead, against the seat.

Time for the orderly.

He twists, getting the Beta under him, and grabs the broken handcuff from the floor. Opens it, the metal winking at him. Cheering him on.

Go on… Do it… Stain those perfect whites… Oh, and how *delicious* it looks, bubbling up from a severed artery.

The van swerves. Brakes slam. Will falls back, spraying blood from his mouth as he laughs. This is *fun*.

He gets up. Crouches, fingers hooked into claws. The doors open and he pounces.

Mine.

Will comes back to himself with a shiver, fighting bile as he stares at the dead bodies around the abandoned van. His shirt and thin jacket stick to his back with sweat, and his skin crawls when Jack comes to stand beside him.

'So, does Abel Gideon still believe he's the Chesapeake Ripper?' the Alpha asks, head down to shield the bare flesh of his neck, his hat low on his head and gloved hands deep in his coat pockets because it's freezing cold today.

'Abel Gideon is having a *difference* of opinion about who he is,' Will replies, staring at the organs strung up in the trees at the edge of the road. 'The man who escaped from that van was *not* in the same state of mind when he did this.'

He was in rut in the van… This is cold. Calculated…

Beverly Katz looks up from her notepad, bundled up against the biting wind.

'He took a uniform, police radio, two 9mm handguns, pepper spray, Taser and handcuffs.' She shakes her head, but Will frowns, still looking over at the display.

'It's what he *didn't* take,' he mutters.

'He hung the organs from the branches with the veins from the victims,' Beverly says, stepping back when she realizes what he's staring at.

'He even tied little bows with some of them,' Jimmy Price calls, gesturing to one such feat.

'Yeah; it's pretty impressive,' Zeller sighs, wiping snow from his hands as he straightens up.

Will feels his mouth twist in distaste.

‘The Chesapeake Ripper would *not* have left the organs behind,’ he says. *He would never do something so… tacky.*

‘Well, if Gideon *isn’t* the Chesapeake Ripper, he’s certainly trying to get his attention,’ Jack growls, and Will nods thoughtfully.

‘Local PD picked up a foot trail leading out of the woods,’ Beverly says. ‘Boot soles are consistent with the ones we found at the crime scene.’

‘How fresh are the tracks?’ Jack asks, and Beverly considers.

‘Two, three hours old,’ she replies.

‘Which direction are they headed?’

Beverly nods her head behind them.

‘Back to Baltimore,’ she says heavily, and Jack sighs, his eyes flickering red. Will turns, staring down the stretch of snowy road, his chest tight with a lingering emotion from the Alpha.

What are you looking for, Gideon? Why are you scared?

***

His next stop is a visit to the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. Alana drives them, and Will pins his visitor badge to his pocket on their way up to Dr Chilton’s office.

I really hate this place.

The Alpha doesn’t greet them at the door; he feels no need to impress a couple of Betas, and he barely glances up for long enough to roll his eyes at them before returning to examining a textbook.

‘I suppose *this* is my fault, too?’ he drawls, setting the gilded magnifying glass down on his desk as Alana closes the door behind her.

‘You did dodge a bullet,’ Will points out, hands in his pockets, glasses on. He’s wearing an extra coating of Beta spray and used a liberal dose of Iris Inhibitor drops on the way over here; the amber around his eyes is barely more than a dull brown, now. He feels confident enough to look over at the Alpha as he continues, ‘Gideon’s *escape* foregoes a trial and a *very* public humiliation for you.’

‘And now you are hosting a private one,’ Chilton replies, leaning forwards and clasping his hands before him, eyes flickering burgundy when he looks up at Will. ‘Next, you’ll be accusing me of arranging his escape**!**’

‘No one’s making that accusation,’ Alana snaps, and Chilton smirks.

‘If we’re tossing around the blame, Dr Bloom, you’re due your fair share.’ His mouth twists as he fights a growl. ‘*You* planted the idea that I was unethically manipulating Gideon.’

‘Well, according to Gideon, you *were*!’ Alana snarls. The tension between them stings Will and he ducks his head, moving to the window to avoid the conflict.

‘After *you* told him I was,’ Chilton replies, and he forces himself to chuckle. ‘You thought *I* was manipulating *him*? He was manipulating *you*.’

‘You were *pushing* him,’ Alana insists, standing tall and fierce before the Alpha. Chilton's nostrils flare.

‘He gave me informed consent to treat him. Said that he was *grateful* for my help in understanding *who* he *is*.’

Alana huffs in frustration and looks to Will for help. He tilts his head and bares his throat to catch the Alpha’s immediate attention.

‘What did you help him understand?’ he asks softly, and Chilton cannot resist the urge to stand, dark eyes locked onto Will, dismissing Alana completely.

‘He was not *insane* when he killed his wife,’ he replies. ‘Killing her *drove* him insane.’

You’re a fool, Frederick. Will looks away before his disgust can show on his face, staring out of the window at the Alpha’s expensive convertible near the front steps.

‘I did *not* convince him that he was a serial killer,’ Chilton continues, still riveted by Will, unable to tear his gaze from the slim, pale throat and sharp cheekbones. ‘I just *reminded* him of the fact.’

Will’s dark shadow erupts and he turns before he can stop himself, baring his teeth as his eyes flash gold.

‘Gideon is *not* the Chesapeake Ripper!’ he snarls. *How dare you disrespect the Ripper in such a way?* His lip curls. ‘Although he might have *thought* he was under *your* care, *Doctor*.’

‘Who he *is* or he *isn’t* doesn’t really matter right now,’ Alana says, instinctively trying to soothe the situation, although her anger still colors her words and she can’t stop her voice from carrying as she rounds on Chilton again. ‘If he *thinks* he is, or if he’s *confused* on that issue, he *will* kill again!’

‘I hope he does not,’ Chilton replies, adopting an air of innocent concern. He shrugs. ‘For your sake… Cannot *imagine* how you would *sleep* with that on your shoulders…’

Heat swarms Will’s body and sweat stings his eyes. Pain cleaves his skull in half as gold sparks dance in the air before him. He shudders, panting for breath as he pulls his glasses off and rubs under his aching brows, trying to squeeze the pain away. Chilton's voice echoes in his ears, drowned out by the heavy thud of his heartbeat.

‘Cannot imagine how you would sleep with that on your shoulders…’

‘How did *you* sleep when Gideon killed *your* nurse?!’ Alana shouts, and Will *feels* the shift as Chilton’s anger spikes. He can smell the tang of rut and grabs the Beta by the arm, pulling her back to calm her down even as his own body releases calming hormones to soothe Chilton.

‘What does Gideon *want*?’ he asks, drawing the Alpha’s attention again, making sure his throat is visible when he asks.

Chilton sits down, rubbing his hands together and staring off to the side as he waits for the red of his eyes to fade.

‘The last thing Abel Gideon said to me is that he intends to tell everyone that he *is* the Chesapeake Ripper.’ He looks directly at them, meeting Alana’s blazing blue eyes before looking at Will, who can’t help but stare across at the far wall.

Chilton sniffs and clears his throat.

‘Now, if that’s all? I’m rather busy; I’m sure you’ll understand.’

And, just like that, they are dismissed. Alana growls under her breath and strides for the door, thrumming with tension. Before Will can leave the room, however, Chilton calls after him.

‘I look forward to seeing you again, *Mr* Graham. It’s been a pleasure, as always.’

Alana shepherds Will out of the room in front of her and makes a point of not closing the door after them. If Frederick wants privacy, he’ll have to get up for it. She also gives Will’s elbow a comforting squeeze on their way back to reception.

‘I hate that man,’ she mutters, signing their badges back in and retrieving her keys. Will hums, but he doesn’t speak until he’s safe inside her car.

‘Just do me a favor?’ he asks, clenching his hand into a trembling fist. ‘Don’t ever leave me alone in a room with that man?’

Alana smiles at him as she starts the engine.

‘I promise.’

***

There’s no time to call Hannibal for advice or even just to hear his voice when Alana drops him back at Quantico. Jack has called a briefing, and Will is one of the last to arrive. He hugs the wall at the back of the room, listening to the Alpha’s voice ringing out with the details of the case, waves of heat chasing each other up and down his spine. His dark shadow laps at the edges of his mind and sweat darkens his curls until they stick to his forehead.

‘Our fugitive is Abel Gideon,’ Jack says, pacing before the listening field agents. ‘Transplant surgeon. Convicted in the first degree in the murders of his wife and her family. Institutionalized at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, where he killed a

nurse and claimed to be the Chesapeake Ripper. Dr Gideon escaped this morning after killing three people. He is armed and dangerous.'

The tide sucks out in his head and Will has to lean back against the wall for support. His thigh muscles ache; they feel weak. The air is hot, and too thick to breathe. He can hear it rasping in his nose as he pants. His ears are full of cotton, muffling Jack's voice.

'He is believed to be at large…' Sweat dribbles down his cheeks and his eyes grind in sandpaper sockets. His pupils blast wide and the light stabs him. '… In the murders of his wife and her family…'

He's falling. The current catches him, dragging him away from the room. He's not there… Not… *anywhere*...

He's surrounded by antlers. He knows this room. Knows these antlers… *My hunting trophies*... They sprout from the walls, but nobody else seems to notice. Jack turns, his voice coming from very far away.

'Institutionalized at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane…'

Will shivers, squirming as slick oozes down his thighs. He's so *empty*… So *lonely*… He needs Hannibal… He needs him *now*…

But Jack's still talking. He can't just leave… Not yet…

'He is armed. He is dangerous. He escaped this morning.'

All I need is one hand free...

An antler brushes his cheek. Not as soft as his raven stag, there is still something comforting about the razor-sharp tips…

'You are armed-' Jack is so very far away… So very *separate* from him… *You don't see me. You don't know me*. '- and you are *extremely* dangerous…'

He's *boiling* inside his skin. His veins burst, and his insides melt as fire eats him alive.

'Institutionalized at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane,' Jack repeats.

I'm afraid they won't let me out… Please don't leave me alone with that man...

'What kind of crazy are you?!' the Alpha bellows. 'You kill! You *will* kill again!'

Would you kill for me, Will? Would you kill again for me?

Terror snatches Will's breath, binding his ribs tight enough to snap them. He can't *move*. He can't run… He can't do *anything*…

Please, Alpha… Please don't hurt me… I'll do anything you want… Please...

Hannibal… He needs Hannibal…

He…

Will blinks, coming back to himself. Where is he? *Where is he?*

He takes a breath. Then another. He's… safe… He *knows* he's safe… He can smell leather, cedarwood and cloves… Hear the scratch of a pen and the crackle of flames…

Will sighs a purr. He's in his Alpha's office, sat in his leather armchair, warm and comfortable.

Protected.

He can't remember how he got here, but he knows he'll be okay.

'Hannibal?'

At Will's quivering voice, Hannibal looks up from his notes. Sets his pen down and rises from the desk, moving quickly to crouch in front of him as his Omega comes out of prodrome. Will's skin still carries a sheen of sweat and his cheeks are flushed. His eyes are dark, the pupils only just starting to react again to the light, blue irises ringed with gold.

Hannibal takes one of Will's hands between both of his own and presses a kiss to his knuckles.

'I'm here,' he murmurs, smiling gently when his mate drags his gaze down to his face. 'That's it… Come back to me… Focus on my voice.'

'Hannibal…' Will sounds hoarse, and Hannibal reaches for the glass of water he's readied on the side table. Hands it to the Omega and watches as Will drinks without question. *So trusting*…

'I want you to tell me what happened,' he says, putting the empty glass on his desk before taking his own seat across from him.

Will blinks again, his brain fuzzy and thick. He's *tired*… But he can also feel a livewire humming beneath his skin. All he wants to do is get up and curl up in his Alpha's lap, but Hannibal has a leg crossed over the other, a clear sign that he wants Will to remain seated across from him.

'Um… I was at a briefing… Jack was talking and then… I… I had a hallucination…' His voice catches and he ducks his head, glaring at his lap because his eyes are swimming and he hates how *scared* he feels. How scared he *sounds*.

'What did you see?' Hannibal asks, looking more closely at him and drawing him back in with his soft voice.

'A thicket of antlers,' Will says, and he sighs, trying to ease some of the pressure in his body, eyes searching for an answer above him that he *knows* isn't there. 'All I heard was my heart.

Dim, but, but… *fast*…' He swallows. 'Like… footsteps… fleeing into silence…'

Hannibal remains quiet. Watches Will struggle to put into words the screaming in his head.

'I don't know how to gauge who I am anymore,' his Omega says; his voice wobbling. He grips the leather armrests in shaking fists, his chest heaving. Gulps in a breath, baring his teeth as he fights the tears. 'I don't *feel* like myself. I feel like… I have been *gradually* becoming different for a while…' He shakes his head, a tear trickling down his cheek. 'I just feel like somebody else.'

Hannibal's heart skips a beat and he has to suppress the urge to purr. His eyes gleam as he looks down his nose at his mate.

That's it, Will… That's it… Just a little more…

'What do you feel like?' he murmurs, working hard to keep the excitement from his voice. *So close…*

And Will doesn't disappoint him.

'I feel crazy,' the Omega whispers, his teeth chattering. He stares at Hannibal, pleading with him, *begging* him for help.

'And that is what you fear most?' Hannibal asks, tilting his head slightly, drawing the truth from Will's mind in the same way he might draw poison from a wound.

Will shakes his head, fighting his rising panic. Remembers the feeling he'd had on Sunday, at the table with Hannibal after losing nearly two *days*… A passing thought, but one that had struck deep and stayed with him.

'I fear not knowing who I *am*,' he replies, his brows creasing together and crest stinging as an echo of the terror snatches his breath. He can't look at Hannibal, can't look at his Alpha in case there's disappointment on his face. Will rubs sweat from his palms onto his thighs, lips clamped tight around the whimper trying to claw its way free of his throat.

'That's what Abel Gideon's afraid of, isn't it?' he says, trying to distract himself, ignoring how much his voice quivers. 'He's like a blind man… Somebody got inside his head and… *moved* all the furniture around.'

It's how I feel… My moorings have gone… I'm drifting in the darkness… Stumbling towards something I don't understand.

Hannibal considers him for a moment. He wants to go to his mate, to comfort him, but that isn't what Will needs right now. He *has* to go through the fear alone. To use it. To channel it into something greater than himself.

'I imagine Abel Gideon would want to find the Chesapeake Ripper to gauge who he is,' he says. 'And who he isn't.'

Will trembles, eyes searching for escape that doesn't exist, and Hannibal's chest tightens.

‘Will…’

A whimper slips free as his Omega looks up, and Hannibal dips his head, catching his attention.

‘You have *me* as your gauge,’ he says gently, and Will nods, because he *trusts* him, more tears slipping down his cheeks. He sniffs, his lower lip trembling, watching as Hannibal rises.

The Alpha moves to stand behind Will’s chair, a hand on either side of his neck.

‘Let me Gentle you,’ Hannibal murmurs, feeling muscles grind when Will nods permission. He reaches around and undoes the top three buttons of Will’s shirt, pulling it wider open so that he can see his crest. Will shivers, bowing his head, and Hannibal smells his scent thicken; smoky musk and salty fear. He winds his left hand around Will’s throat, holding him in a choke, and Will closes his eyes, grateful for the support. Hannibal pulls him back against the seat, taking control, and then brushes his forefinger down the five ridges of his Omega’s crest, marveling at how *soft* the skin is.

Will keens, gripping tight to the armrests as lightning snaps down his spine. Heat floods him and he releases a long, slow breath, quivering as Hannibal begins to massage his crest. It’s *instant*; a switch in his mind, obliterating all thought beyond *Alpha*.

‘*Hannibal…*’

Hannibal squeezes the ridges, digging his thumbs into the cluster of nerves to release endorphins. Will needs this; needs to stop fighting his biology. He watches his mate become pliant, the tension draining away as prodrome returns, pleasure wracking him until it’s all he can think about. All he *is*.

‘That’s it,’ he whispers, dipping his head to the burgundy crest, licking up tangy sweat and sucking on a bruise left over from the weekend, building up the sensations until they overwhelm the other man.

Will bucks at the feel of his Alpha’s tongue rasping across the throbbing, sensitive ridges. His voice chokes into silence as a forefinger and thumb pinches the middle of the crest, locking him in place. He can *feel* himself falling, spinning into endless heat, but he can’t stop it. He’s scrabbling to hold onto himself, to *remember*, but he can’t *move*; he can’t do *anything* but *feel…*

‘Let go, Will,’ Hannibal purrs, squeezing his crest again, leaning around to look into his Omega’s face as he continues to manipulate him.

Will shudders, his pupils blowing wide until only a faint ring of gold shows at the edges. His skin shines with sweat and his heart beats a rapid tempo in his throat.

Water dribbles down the ladder, over the desk… The office is melting, flooding, and he’s disappearing with it. He holds on tight to the chair, braced against the boiling water, holding his head up because he doesn’t want it, *he doesn’t want it*, but it’s rising up his throat, over his chin… Brushing his lips, slipping inside his mouth and drowning him…

Don't fight it… Don't fight… That's it…

He can feel Hannibal's hands on him, peeling sodden clothes from his body. Cries at the rasp of fabric across his tender flesh because it *hurts*, but then his Alpha is kissing him, soothing him, and he's coming, he's *coming* and it's *so*, so good…

Why was he scared? His Alpha is here… Hannibal is *here*… There's nothing to worry about… Nothing to *think* about. He's not *him* anymore… He's not *anyone* anymore…

The water drags him down. Strong hands leave his crest to roll up his shirt sleeve. There's the prick of a needle, a moment of pain and then he's *free*, spinning into darkness. Endless black, sparking with red and gold as Hannibal takes him, owns him, *mates* him… And Will lets go, because he doesn't want to fight anymore. Doesn't want to *think* anymore…

Yours… I'm yours. Do what you want to me…

***

Waking the next morning is difficult. Will groans, pressing his face into the pillow to block out the daylight, his head pounding. Is he hungover? What *happened* last night?

He shivers as hands rub over his shoulders and down his spine, gasping when they gather up the slick leaking from him. Tingles make his crest throb in time to his heartbeat and he can't help but rock down into the mattress, moaning softly when a finger works its way inside him, rubbing *that* spot until his balls hang hot and heavy as he lifts up, tucking his knees under him to present for his Alpha. *Ohh… This* he remembers. He remembers doing *this* a *lot* last night… And it's *so*, so right…

'Hannibal…'

'That's it…' Hannibal bows over Will's back, slipping a second finger inside him and gripping him by the nape of the neck, riding out the frantic bucks as the Omega comes around him, squeezing him in a burning vice.

'*Fuck*!' Will grabs fistfuls of sex-stained sheets, white light flashing behind his eyelids as he spills himself across his chest and onto the bed. But Hannibal doesn't stop; he drags his fingers down, stretching him, and then pulls out for just long enough to rub slick over his hardness before he's pushing back inside, guiding himself in with one firm thrust. Will whimpers, feeling it in his stomach, his *throat*, pushing up as he drops his forehead to the mattress and submits.

'*Fuck*, Hannibal…'

'Come here,' Hannibal purrs, wrapping his arms around Will's chest and pulling him up so that his back is against his Alpha's broad chest, hairs rasping his sensitive skin, hot breath tickling his crest as Hannibal pants into his neck. Will holds onto Hannibal's forearm with both hands, nails digging into his flesh, eyes screwed tight as he struggles to breathe, tensing and pulling with his muscles, his thighs quivering.

Hannibal rocks his hips, pulling nearly all the way out and then plunging back inside, deep and hard. He grips Will's hip tight to stop him from moving, controlling the rhythm, and feels the other man judder. He laughs, his hair sticking to the sweat on his forehead, and shoves Will down so that he can take him hard and fast, reaching around to stroke him in time with his thrusts.

God… Climax smashes into him, breaking him apart. Will comes with a keening gasp, his aching throat not sure what sound to make. He convulses, every muscle strung tight as it rises higher and higher, bringing tears to his eyes because *Hannibal is still moving*, chasing his own orgasm, and his swelling knot pulls on Will's throbbing insides, dragging wave after wave of pleasure from his body.

And then Hannibal's hips snap, two, three more times and he spills himself inside him, falling forwards with a snarl and sinking his teeth into the scarred muscle of Will's shoulder, ripping into him and claiming him *again*, marking him as his own.

Will hisses in pain, feeling blood run over his skin, but he can hear himself purr in response to the deep rumbles in Hannibal's chest, and he moans at the feel of Hannibal's tongue lapping at the wound. The pain is a good reminder that he's alive, that he's *himself*, and he uses it to come back from the high, grounding himself in the sting.

'Hmm… I like when you bite me,' he murmurs, snuggling beneath Hannibal's comforting weight, pulling an arm free so that he can bring Hannibal's hand to his mouth and kiss his knuckles. Feels Hannibal tense behind him, and looks back at him, frowning at the concern on his Alpha's face. 'What?'

Why aren't you in heat?

Hannibal peers into Will's blue eyes, watching the way his pupils react to the changing light. Pulls his hand free of Will's grip so that he can cup the side of his Omega's face, checking the scent glands for signs of swelling. A little inflamed, but nowhere near as big as they were last night… Will's not even slipped back into prodrome, though he *is* warm, his skin shining with sweat.

'Hannibal?' Will's chest tightens and fear snakes through him, making his eyes sting as shards of glass rattle around inside his skull. 'Is everything okay?'

'Everything's fine,' Hannibal lies, schooling his features to calm. No reason to worry Will. He releases his face and settles behind him, pulling Will onto his side and holding him close, ignoring the unease coiling in his stomach.

This isn't what he expected. An intermittent heat, yes, but not this. These *snatches* aren't long enough to burn through the chemicals built up in Will's body; not intense enough to satisfy the hormones inflaming his brain…

Did I push you too hard? Too fast? Or are you just building up to a real heat? Why are you fighting it, Will?

‘Thank you for Gentling me,’ Will says softly, dragging him back to the room. He strokes back and forth across Hannibal’s fingers, enjoying the tangy musk smeared across his Alpha’s skin. ‘I, er… I needed calming down.’

‘Of course,’ Hannibal replies, nuzzling his curls. Will smells sweet and spicy, a lingering trace of heat in his scent, though he’d hoped for more. Perhaps a little fear will spark the fire. ‘It’s understandable that you would be worried. Your mental health is deteriorating; nothing more terrifying than losing yourself.’

Will holds his breath, waiting for his heart to start beating again. Hannibal’s words cut deep, and he squeezes his eyes shut, waiting for the panic to subside. Forces himself to nod and hum in agreement.

‘Good thing I have you as my gauge,’ he says quietly, kissing Hannibal’s knuckles again. He sighs, shifting as his Alpha’s knot begins to go down, and pulls away when Hannibal slips out of him. ‘I, er… I should go… I have to get back to work.’

‘Will…’ Hannibal catches his wrist and Will pauses, sat up on the edge of the bed, looking down at his strong, golden Alpha. ‘Be careful,’ Hannibal warns, and Will swallows, managing a small smile as he leans down to kiss him.

‘I *am*,’ he murmurs, holding very still as Hannibal holds his chin to deepen the kiss. Warmth tickles him and he can’t stop a breathy moan from slipping past his lips when they part, blinking slowly as his scalp prickles. ‘Don’t worry about me. I’m stronger than I look.’

‘I know,’ Hannibal replies, stroking a curl from Will’s face. He tilts his head, giving his mate a small smile. ‘But you look terrible.’

Will huffs a laugh and shakes his head. Manages to get to his feet and makes his way, somewhat unsteadily, towards the bathroom. He feels weak…

‘You really know how to compliment a partner,’ he says, but, after closing the door behind him, his smile fades and he peers more closely at his reflection in the mirror. Hannibal’s right; he *does* look terrible. Pale and grey, with pinched cheeks and dark shadows around his eyes…

It’s getting to me…

He turns away in disgust. Showers in cool water, biting his lip to keep from wincing as the pellets batter his aching body. Washes his hair with Hannibal’s shampoo and leaves the Beta spray off his bare flesh because he can’t stand the idea of how much that would sting right now.

I can do this. I can handle it.

When he returns to the bedroom, a towel around his waist, Will sees that Hannibal has already chosen his clothes for him, laying them on a chair beside the fireplace. He huffs, but rubs the fabric of the thin sweater and black cotton between his fingers, appreciating how *soft* it is. He doesn’t even remember *bringing* these clothes with him to the Alpha’s house, but

they're his size, so he must have brought them over at some point, and he appreciates the gesture, even if it *is* a little controlling.

He dresses, gritting his teeth when he buckles the trousers around his aching abdomen, and scrubs fresh sweat from his forehead before going downstairs.

Hannibal is in the kitchen, wearing slacks and a red knit sweater, and he hands Will a cup of coffee when his Omega wanders in.

'Here; you need this today,' he says, wrapping an arm around Will when his Omega tucks himself against his side. Will hums, struggling to focus on anything, staring into space as Hannibal make himself a drink. He sways when the Alpha shifts to look down at him, and hands the drink back without question when Hannibal reaches for it.

Frowning, Hannibal opens Will's bloodshot eyes, checking his temperature. He's hot, but not excessively… No doubt his Omega feels very ill, his body desperate to be rid of the excessive estrogen poisoning it.

'Perhaps you should stay at home today,' he murmurs, hugging Will close and speaking into his mate's hair. Will moans, snuggling closer, but he shakes his head, pinching his brow to relieve some of his pain.

'I can't,' he mutters. 'Until Gideon's caught, Jack needs the whole team in.'

'I'm sure Jack would understand,' Hannibal replies, and Will snorts, raising an eyebrow at him.

'Have you *met* him?' he says. Looks away, his gaze growing distant before he visibly shakes himself, returning to the present, and gulps his coffee down in three swallows. 'I have to go. I'll call you later.'

'Your car is at the office,' Hannibal says, opening a drawer and pulling out a couple of folded bills. 'Take this; call a cab.'

'Thanks.' Will pockets the cash and winds an arm up around Hannibal's neck, kissing him hungrily, arching his whole body against his Alpha's. He doesn't want to leave; doesn't want to be apart from him for even a second. The very *idea* of walking out of the house and leaving him behind makes him want to *cry,* of all things. 'God… why is this so hard?'

Because you're in heat, Hannibal thinks, stroking Will's cheek. He smiles, drinking in the sight of his Omega's flushed cheeks, bright eyes and swollen lips, breathing deep his thick, syrupy scent. Then, because he knows Will has forgotten, he says,

'Don't forget your spray.'

Will jerks, instinctively grabbing for the little can in his trouser pocket, guilt flashing over his face. He'd nearly walked out into the world without it… *What's wrong with me?*

'Thanks,' he mumbles. 'I'll do it outside.'

‘Eye drops, too,’ Hannibal adds. He returns to his coffee, stirring in a heaped sugar before taking a sip. ‘I’ll see you later. My office?’

‘Yeah; I’ll come by when we’re finished,’ Will promises. He hesitates, rocking as if he wants to kiss his Alpha again, and Hannibal watches the warring desires. *An independent mind in a dependent body…* A heady mixture…

Gritting his teeth, Will nods and backs away from the other man, ignoring the way his headache spikes with every step towards the front door.

I’m fine. Everything’s fine. It’s just the flu or something… Nothing to worry about…

***

‘Gideon didn’t leave a manifesto,’ Beverly says, her voice cutting through the hot fog shimmering in Will’s brain. He’s been at work for less than an hour but already Hannibal’s suggestion that he stay at home seems like it was a good one. He’s struggling to focus on anything but how *uncomfortable* he feels. Hot tingles race up and down his spine and he’s *melting* with heat; sweat makes his clothes stick to him, trickling over his scalp and down his back. His throat *aches*; compressed by swollen, tender glands beneath his ears.

Definitely flu… Please let it be flu…

‘We confiscated all correspondence from his outside admirers,’ Beverly continues, updating Jack over the top of the orderly’s body, Price and Zeller beside her. ‘We’re going through everything now.’

‘Good.’ Jack nods.

‘Any secret communiqués or coded messages written in bodily fluids, or anything else, we’ll find them,’ Price adds.

Will’s shadow laughs, making him turn his head towards them. It’s as much as he can manage; he can’t look at them because *they’re not his Alpha*, but he has to correct them.

‘You won’t find anything,’ he rasps, and Beverly glances over at him, surprised by how hoarse his voice is. ‘Whatever’s going on with Gideon, it’s in his head.’

Jack frowns at him, but only for a moment because Zeller replies,

‘Well, there’s not much left in *these* heads.’ He gestures down to the cadavers. ‘All organ removal was done post-mortem, including the transorbital lobotomies.’

‘It wasn’t *technically* a lobotomy,’ Beverly says, shrugging when her Betas look at her. ‘He didn’t remove any of the brain. He just… scrambled them’

‘Went in through the top of the eye socket,’ Zeller says, but his voice is distant under the sound of trickling water.

I know that sound… It’s coming again, isn’t it…? Hannibal…

Will turns, realizing the sound is coming from the body drawers. Water oozes from the doors, dribbling down the sheets of metal, splashing over the tiled floor…

Let go…

'It *wasn't* a lobotomy,' Katz insists, her voice muffled under the creaking of glacier ice. Will stares at the water pooling at his feet, his reflected eyes ringed with gold.

I'm yours…

He looks up, tracking Jack's voice as the Alpha speaks. He can hear it vibrating in the air, the sound caressing his skin, and he has to fight down a purr. Jack's an Alpha… He'll do.

'Why remove all of the other organs from the bodies and leave them intact, and *just* scramble the brains?'

As suddenly as it appeared, the water's gone. Not a trace. Will looks around for it, frowning, dread settling like a lead weight in his chest.

It was never there.

Just like the animal in his chimney… *It's in my head…*

His voice trembles when he speaks, but Will *has* to tell them. He *has* to make them *understand*.

'It's what they did to him.'

'It's what *who* did to him?' Jack asks, frowning at him, at how *ill* he looks.

'Dr Chilton, every psychiatrist and PhD candidate who attempted any kind of therapy,' Will explains. 'Pushed and prodded, gave him tests… Told him who he *was*, who he *wasn't*…'

Will can feel his head drooping, but he can't help it. He's so *tired*; so weak… His muscles are aching; all he wants to do is lie down somewhere soft and quiet. The overhead lights are too bright; they're stinging his eyes and burning his skin. The smell in here, the stench of death and chemicals, it's too much… It's making his head pound and his stomach churn with sickness.

'Alright; I want a list of every therapist, every doctor, any kind of psychiatric professional that worked with or talked to Dr Gideon,' Jack says, and Beverly nods, ready to set Price and Zeller on it.

Will pinches the bridge of his nose, trying to squeeze some of the pain away from his eyes.

'Alana Bloom will be on that list,' he says, and Jack's eyes flicker red. She's one of his, after all. He won't risk anything happening to her.

***

Tucking himself near the wall to avoid the students filing from Alana's lecture hall at the end of class, Will wanders closer as the Beta packs up her desk. He has his hands in his pockets, one fist wrapped around his can of Beta spray, the other around his bottle of suppressants, and he offers her a small smile when she looks up at him. She's still breathtakingly beautiful, and he can feel fire lick up his spine, settling as throbbing heat in his crest.

I would have asked you to bond me, if it weren't for Hannibal…

'Are you my protective custody?' Alana teases, sliding her laptop into its case. Will looks up, almost rolling his eyes, but he can't drag his gaze from her for long because she's *so* pretty and she smells *so* good – like caramel and roses and *home*.

What the hell is going on with my body?

His gut twists and he tightens his jaw as his skull splits in two, working to keep the pain from showing on his face.

'You heard.'

It's not a question, but Alana nods anyway, zipping up the bag.

'I heard I get an armed escort until Gideon's apprehended,' she replies, and Will sniffs a laugh.

'You'll have a real FBI agent, not a teacher with a temporary badge,' he promises.

'Too bad.' Alana grins, propping one hand on her hip, her blue sparkling. 'Would've been fun to cozy up with your dogs in front of a space heater.'

Memories of their kiss flood his brain and Will glances down, hiding his blush. There's an electric charge running through him, sending his senses spinning into overdrive. Alana's scent makes his insides writhe, and he can smell the first hint of slick as his body responds to her.

'You don't need protective custody to cozy up with my dogs,' he says, and then, because he *can't* seem to help himself, he sighs and adds, 'Or *me*, for that matter.'

Alana draws closer as Will's musk sweetens, calling to her. She wants to hold him, kiss him, take him home with her…

'I just need a little more… *stability* on my part,' Will finishes, gesturing towards his head, and the bitterness in his voice snaps her back to reality. The Omega is clammy, with dark bruises beneath his eyes and flushed cheeks. His irises are ringed with a thick band of gold, bright with pain, and she can see the tension in his muscles as he tries to keep from curling around himself. What's wrong with him?

Alana reaches up to cup the side of Will's face, trying to soothe him, and she frowns when she feels the heat radiating from him. If it weren't for his lack of scent, his soft musk buried under chemical Beta pheromones, she'd think he was due a heat.

‘You’re really warm.’ He *can’t* be prodromal; he wouldn’t smell so bland, and he wouldn’t be able to keep his hands off everyone around him…

Will moves his face away, offering her a twisted smile.

‘Yeah, I tend to run hot,’ he replies. He walks towards the desk, putting some space between them, fine tremors wracking him as he fights the urge to pull Alana into his arms. ‘You know they say *stress* raises body temperature,’ he points out, and the Beta crosses her arms.

‘Can also trigger a heat; maybe you should take a suppressant,’ she replies, and Will shakes his nearly-empty bottle at her, staring at two of the little tablets in his palm.

‘*Way* ahead of you,’ he drawls, knocking them back with the ease of practice.

Alana looks down at the floor.

‘They’re gonna kill Gideon, aren’t they?’ she asks, and the sadness in her tone makes Will look round sharply. Her grief cuts at him, and he turns to face her.

‘Whatever happens to him has *nothing* to do with you,’ he says, but Alana’s expression doesn’t change.

‘Gideon can’t be *completely* responsible for his actions if he was subjected to an outside influence,’ she replies.

Will snorts.

‘What, like, er, *Chilton* telling him he’s the Chesapeake Ripper?’

Alana sighs.

‘Like *me*,’ she says. ‘Telling him he’s not in a state of mind to know who he is.’

Dizziness swarms his vision with grey spots and Will sinks down to lean back against the desk. He doesn’t have the energy for this; the world is too big, too dark… He just wants to be at home, in his nest with his Alpha…

But he can’t *do* that, so he pushes through the hot sludge of his brain and concentrates on thinking like Gideon. What did Hannibal say about a gauge…?

‘Well, he’s gonna want *somebody* to tell him who he is, and I think he’ll be looking for the Ripper to do that,’ he says heavily.

Alana comes to lean next to him, close enough to absorb his heat and to let his scent enfold her, but not close enough to touch. Will ducks his head, taking a slow, deep breath to control the aching knot in his gut. He’s so *empty*…

‘What do you think will *happen* if Gideon finds the Chesapeake Ripper?’ Alana asks, and Will tilts his head, swallowing down a purr.

‘The Chesapeake Ripper will kill him,’ he says, and he can’t help but smile at Alana’s puzzled look. ‘He took credit for his *work*,’ he explains, a bubble of dark excitement in his chest. *I know you… I understand you…* ‘The Ripper would consider that… *rude*.’

And if there’s one thing I will not tolerate, he thinks, wading into the dark current of his mind, *it is rudeness*.

***

He doesn’t remember travelling to Dr Carruthers’s office. Will blinks and he’s in the outer foyer of the doctor’s office, his skin stinging because *something bad happened here*. Resonances whip him raw; fear and pain, sadistic joy and shock…

‘Jack, wait…’

He’s too late. The Alpha strides into the room and growls when he sees the dead man in his chair. Will holds back for as long as possible, picking up traces of Abel Gideon’s scent, mingled with the rich, coppery tang of blood and salt. There’s something else, too, a faint trace of perfume… another Alpha? Will tries to place it as he pulls on the blue latex gloves offered to him by an officer, but Jack’s voice calling him in makes him jump and forget about it.

He takes a deep breath, bracing himself, and steps into the main office.

The dead Alpha’s skin is already tightening into rigor mortis, his tongue spilling out of the slit in his throat. A *Columbian necktie*… Popular with drug lords down in South America, and, apparently, Abel Gideon.

‘Dr Paul Carruthers,’ Jack explains, shaking his head at the murder. ‘Wrote an article for the Journal of Criminal Psychology, in which he described Dr Gideon as being a “pathological narcissist who suffers from psychotic episodes”.’

‘Let’s hope he got some satisfaction from being proved right,’ Will replies, staring at the body.

‘I think this is about more than just getting the Chesapeake Ripper’s attention,’ Jack says, and Will hums.

‘Gideon’s mind was *dissected* by psychiatrists,’ he says. ‘And, as a surgeon, he is applying his own skill set.’ He draws closer, his dark shadow purring around his ribs, pulsing in time to his heartbeat. Sneers down at the dead psychiatrist, the gossip, and adds, ‘He gave *you* something better to do with your tongue than *wag* it.’

Jack’s low growl makes him pause, giving Zeller time to interject from behind the chair.

‘That’s not how he died,’ he says, gesturing to the throat. ‘Drained him till his heart stopped.’

‘Got a little on his collar,’ Beverly says, sharp eyes spotting it even from further back in the room. ‘Other than that, didn’t spill a drop.’

‘That’s because it’s all in here,’ Price calls, lifting the lid on a medical cooler box and holding up a bag of blood. ‘Four and a half liters, all packed in ice.’ He puts the bag back and picks up the note that had been left on top. ‘“Please deliver to the Red Cross”.’

‘That’s considerate,’ Beverly drawls, but Jack’s eyes flicker red.

‘He’s peacocking for the Ripper,’ he growls, and Will nods.

‘This is like flowers and chocolate before a first date.’

Cocky bastard.

Before Will can even *comprehend* his flash of jealousy, his eyes drift down Carruthers’s arm, to the mouse under his hand. Will drops to a crouch before him and uses the dead finger to click the pointer, waking the laptop left on the side table. TattleCrime.com opens, showing bright red letters above an article on the murder, set against a high-definition photograph of the dead doctor.

“CHESEAPEAKE RIPPER RIPS AGAIN.”

‘How is this news already?’ Jack gasps, staring down at the screen in confusion. Will straightens as Zeller comes to stand behind him.

‘Someone from the Baltimore PD must have taken a picture on their phone and sold it to TattleCrime,’ Zeller says, but it doesn’t feel right to Will. Before he can argue, though, Jack points to the picture.

‘That photo was taken before the blood was put on ice. Dr Gideon was still here.’

Always poking where you’re not wanted, Will thinks, and he *knows*. He *understands* now why he could smell her perfume, her lingering scent, so delicately laced with fear.

Oh, dear… You are in trouble…

‘He has Freddy Lounds.’

***

Waiting for Will to arrive at his office that evening, Hannibal scrolls through the latest Chesapeake Ripper stories on TattleCrime.com, fury building in his chest with every word he reads. He can feel the pressure building in his eyes, an itch as his irises glow red, and he has to take a long, slow breath when Will knocks on the door and walks in.

‘Hannibal?’

Will pulls up short at the waves of black anger pouring from his Alpha; it makes the very *air* sting his lungs. He whimpers, hurrying to pull off his jacket as his body releases calming hormones to soothe the Alpha’s rage.

‘Is everything alright?’ he asks, closing the door behind him and dropping his coat on the back of his chair before approaching the desk. Hannibal is reading something on his tablet, his free hand clenched into a white-knuckled fist, shoulders rigid and a muscle jumping in his jaw.

I’ve never seen you so furious…

Will reaches for him, desperate to comfort him, but before he can touch him, Hannibal turns off the screen and turns to face him, moving faster than he expected and taking Will’s hand in his own. He lifts it to his mouth, kissing Will’s palm, and sucks up the gentle smell of him to regain control of himself.

‘I’m fine,’ he says softly, reaching up to stroke Will’s cheek. ‘… Unlike *you*.’

Will huffs, listing closer and dipping his head towards his Alpha, shifting to straddle one of Hannibal’s legs.

‘Yeah; I don’t feel great,’ he admits, bracing himself with a hand on the other man’s shoulder. ‘Better than Dr Carruthers, but I think I’m coming down with something. Wish I’d taken your advice and stayed home.’

‘The dead psychiatrist,’ Hannibal says, dropping light kisses onto the blue veins at Will’s wrist, making the Omega purr.

‘Yeah… Gideon got there first. He’s dead.’

‘I know; I saw on TattleCrime.’ Hannibal gestures to the tablet and Will’s shadow reaches out, twining with his Alpha’s lingering darkness.

Were you angry because I had to see another dead body, or was it something else?

‘Gideon has Freddy Lounds,’ he murmurs, moving even closer to Hannibal, sweat shining on his forehead as his Alpha’s rich musk soaks into his skin, filling his lungs and drowning his brain in golden light. ‘He’s trying to lure the Chesapeake Ripper to him.’

Hannibal hums, sliding a hand up Will’s inner thigh, the other slipping beneath Will’s shirt, caressing the line of muscle at his hip. His Omega is hard, desperate to be touched, to be filled and fucked and owned, but Hannibal’s evening just became *very* busy. Still, there are other ways to look after his mate…

‘Let me take you home,’ he whispers, massaging Will’s erection through the cotton of his trousers. Looks up and watches as his Omega’s pupils widen, black swallowing blue until it surrenders to gold. *There we go…*

He stands, pushing Will back a step, and then encourages his Omega to hug him around the waist, holding Will by the nape of his neck so that he can squeeze and stroke his crest, holding him up when Will’s knees buckle and he comes with a sudden, sharp cry.

‘*Hannibal!*’

‘That’s it, Will.’ Hannibal cups Will’s cheek, checking the glassy, vacant expression. ‘Can you tell me where you are?’

‘*H-Hannibal*...’ Will doesn’t understand… He sways closer, seeking the soft warmth of his Alpha’s body, his clothes rubbing like steel wire over his skin. He whimpers, tears rolling down his cheeks when Hannibal lets go of him to undo his tie, but he turns when pushed and closes his eyes as Hannibal winds the silk around his head, blinding him.

I’m safe… I’m safe… I’m yours.

‘Alpha…’

‘Come with me,’ Hannibal purrs, taking Will by the hand and switching off his lamp. He leads the passive Omega to the door, draping his own coat around the smaller man’s trembling body so that Will can soothe himself with his scent. ‘Hold that. Very good.’

‘Hannibal…’

‘Relax, Will.’ Hannibal pulls him through the door, hugging him close as he locks the office behind him, and then pins him up against the wall of the waiting room, devouring his mouth until Will is writhing and gasping against him, unable to *think*, unable to breathe.

One hand still holding Hannibal’s coat around him, Will winds the other in his Alpha’s silky hair, pulling him close so that he can drown in the taste of him. *This, this, this*...

He can hear the glacier creaking again, bearing down on him, catching him in a rip ride and plunging him into hot darkness. Water pours down the wall behind him, spilling over his shoulders to cover the floor, and he hears it splash around him as he bends a knee to wrap a leg around Hannibal’s hips, bringing his groin flush to his Alpha’s.

Oh God... Hannibal’s so *hard*… Will moans, trying to suck down his Alpha’s tongue, his skin crackling with electricity. *I’m going to burn… It’s going to spark a fire, any second now*…

Will tastes so good. Hannibal can feel himself getting lost in the sensations, in the smell and feel of his heat-drunk mate, and he growls as he drags himself away from the kiss. Will whimpers but he doesn’t follow; Hannibal pinned him against the wall, and there he shall stay until he’s moved again. He does grinds his hips back before bucking forwards, though, writhing to show his Alpha how *attractive* he is… A siren song, and one quickly shattering Hannibal’s iron control…

‘Home. *Now*,’ Hannibal snarls, grabbing Will by the back of the neck and marching him to the car. He shoves him into the passenger seat, not caring that Will’s elbow knocks against the dashboard, hurrying around the bonnet to climb behind the wheel. He hauls him closer for a kiss, barely able to keep from ripping off the blindfold and letting his wild, sex-smelling Omega straddle him and ride him until they both come screaming.

‘Hannibal… Hannibal…’

Will rubs his hands over Hannibal's chest, his heart thundering in his ears, sweat running like rain over his skin. He's an inferno; liquid fire courses through his veins, splitting apart his bones until they shatter, bubbling inside his organs. It *hurts*, it hurts so much and he's so *empty*, so *lonely*. His kidneys are ripping, his gut twisting. Even his *teeth* are sore. He needs his Alpha, needs his knot, his spit, his seed. His *everything*.

Hannibal drives fast, rut-red eyes flicking up to the rearview mirror every few seconds because the last thing he needs right now is for the police to pull him over. *They wouldn't survive*.

Will is growling, groaning and gasping as he rubs his hands over his own body, grinding his ass back against the seat as slick dribbles out of him. He whimpers for Hannibal when the car stops and his Alpha leaves him, pressing kiss after kiss to his mate's cheek and lips and chin when Hannibal *finally*, finally returns to open the door and gather him up into his arms. They're outside; the cool air is a blessed relief against his raging hot skin, but then Hannibal walks him into the house and the door shuts and it's so *warm*…

'Hannibal…'

'Come here, Will.' Hannibal takes his coat from around Will's shoulders, still hugging him close as he hangs it up. Threads snap and buttons clatter to the floor in his haste to get at his Omega's flesh, making Will pant with frenzied need. Hot hands come up to paw at his suit jacket, but Hannibal pushes him away. 'Upstairs; this way.'

He takes Will by the crest again, winding his other hand around the front of his Omega's neck. By the way Will stumbles up the stairs, he knows it's the only thing holding him upright, and he lets go to shove Will face first onto the bed as soon as they're in the master bedroom.

'Take your trousers off,' he growls, already pulling at Will's boots and socks. 'And underwear.'

Will scratches himself in his hurry to obey, shoving the damp fabric down his legs and baring himself for his Alpha. He can hear Hannibal over by the dresser; hears the clink of a buckle and then his scent grows stronger as he returns. Will sits up, reaching blindly for him, sobbing out a purr when he touches Hannibal's face again.

'Hannibal… *Hannibal*…'

Turning Will onto his front, Hannibal kneels beside him, still fully dressed. He trails kisses over his shoulder blades and down his spine, distracting him as he loops the leather collar of the crest brace around Will's neck. He has it buckled in place and is tightening the ring around the ridges before the Omega realizes what he's doing, and Will shudders at the pressure, coming hard against himself as he grabs hold of the covers. It's good… it's so, *so* good… White and gold crashes together behind his eyelids, flooding his brain until it's all he is. He can't even *think* to reach up and fight Hannibal off, and then his Alpha tightens the ring again, paralyzing him.

‘I want you to stay here, Will,’ Hannibal says, leaning down to suck Will’s clamped crest. He feels a faint tremor run through his Omega’s body; the only indication of how *sweet* that orgasm must have been, and he purrs as he sucks again, gathering up a handful of the slippery slick glistening on Will’s thighs. His Omega lies still, heart racing, breath hitching in and out of silent sobs as he rides the waves of climax, again and again, and Hannibal grins at how *delicious* he smells. How *perfect* the torture. Will is so *utterly* helpless, entirely at Hannibal’s mercy, with no choice but to trust that his Alpha will protect him and let him come down from the high before it breaks him.

‘I’ll be back soon,’ Hannibal whispers, kissing Will’s ear. He sits up and rubs slick up and down the specially designed dildo he bought after Will’s first heat. Shaped to simulate an Alpha’s knot, it should go some way to easing the pain in his Omega’s body when Hannibal can’t be inside him. ‘This will help.’

Bracing one hand on Will’s flank, Hannibal pushes his Omega’s thighs further apart, another purr soothing him as he begins to push the silicone past the ring of muscle. Will keens, a breathy little sound barely loud enough to hear, but Hannibal slows, rocking the tip back and forth until he smells the change in Will’s scent. It thickens, smoke overlaid with syrupy sugar, and Hannibal can tell the ache is lessening even as Will stretches around the artificial knot.

There’s another moment of resistance and Hannibal reaches between Will’s legs to stroke his hardness, circling his thumb over his sensitive tip to distract him. He smiles, watching as his stubborn, *powerful* Omega manages to clench a weak fist in the quilt, and then the toy slips all the way inside, held safe in the pulsing vice of Will’s body.

‘*Good*; that’s good.’ Hannibal litters Will’s back with kisses, massaging the base of his spine before he lets go, checking that the knot won’t be pushed out. ‘That’s it, Will… I want you to keep this safe for me until I come back.’

He rubs his cheek over Will’s sweaty curls, marking him with his scent whilst taking his Omega’s smell with him, and squashes the cramping in his gut at the thought of leaving him alone like this. *Nobody is going to break in. Nobody can smell him… He’s safe… And he’s mine*.

He *needs* to go. But Will is so very defenseless, and Hannibal hates that he can’t cover him with his body and be everything he needs, over and over and over…

‘I’ll be as quick as I can,’ he promises, stroking Will’s cheek and rolling the Omega’s head to the side to make it easier to breathe. He leaves him blindfolded; if Will were to look up at him, gold eyes wet with tears, distraught that his Alpha is leaving him, Hannibal knows he wouldn’t be able to go. As it is, he swallows the lump in his throat and tears himself away, washing shaking hands in the bathroom and fetching a new tie from the dressing room before going out.

Wait for me, Will. I’ll come back for you. I promise.

***

He’s fishing.

Will pulls the rod back, the line whistling through the early morning air, and releases it downstream. Summer is his favorite time to catch trout; birds chirrup in the trees around him and the water feels good as it runs between his legs, cooling him through his waterproof waders.

‘Will?’

He looks around. The raven stag is grazing on the eastern bank, but the voice isn’t coming from there. It’s beside him… Is Hannibal… *fishing* with him? He grins; he never thought he’d get his mate to engage in his pastime.

‘Will; come back to me.’

The dream is fading. Darkness blends into fur, into feathers… He’s lying with the stag, curled between its antlers… A clever, obsidian eye looks at him, *into* him, through him… Blood smears his hands, releasing a thick, coppery smell into the air, and, with it, the rapid thud of his heart.

Garrett Jacob Hobbs leans over his shoulder, dead eyes like scuffed marbles, blue fingers gripping the back of his neck as teeth tear into his flesh.

See?

Will wakes with a gasp, grabbing for his crest, soaked through with sweat and fighting for air. Hannibal rears back to avoid an elbow in the nose, hushing one of the dogs when it barks. *I should learn their names,* he thinks.

‘H-Hannibal?’

‘I’m here, Will.’ Hannibal smiles at him when Will turns, and opens his arms to welcome him against his chest for a hug, stroking the smaller man’s hair as they both lie down again. Will sinks into the warm strength of Hannibal’s embrace, filling his nose with his scent to banish the remnants of his nightmare. He’s trembling, but Hannibal doesn’t comment; just pulls the covers back up over them both so they don’t get cold.

‘Where am I?’ Will mumbles, looking around. His house… They’re at *his* house… ‘What time is it?’

‘It’s late,’ Hannibal murmurs, still stroking him. ‘Or early, depending on how you look at it.’

‘I went to your office,’ Will says, frowning because he has the strangest feeling he’d fallen asleep in *Hannibal’s* bed… ‘I don’t…’ He sighs, rubbing his cheeks. ‘I don’t know what’s happening.’

‘Rest,’ Hannibal replies, smoothing down Will’s shoulders and arms, feeling the tension draining from his mate’s body as he obeys. ‘You’ll be alright.’

‘Sorry I woke you,’ Will mutters, snuggling closer and draping a bare leg between both of Hannibal’s. ‘Maybe you should sleep alone tomorrow; get a decent night.’

‘Don’t worry about me,’ Hannibal replies, dropping a kiss to Will’s forehead. He twines their fingers together, listening to the Omega’s breathing become slower, more even, denying himself sleep for a while longer so that he can appreciate the feel of his Omega, safe in his arms. He’d cut it close earlier; Will had been a twitching, incoherent mess by the time he’d returned, barely conscious even after Hannibal had released him from the brace. He’d cried when the toy came out, panting against Hannibal’s neck as the Alpha gathered him into his lap and pushed inside, filling him with a *real* knot, and he’d mumbled something about wanting to go home, to feed the dogs, between shuddering orgasms.

I really would do anything for you, Hannibal thinks, looking around at the ramshackle little farmhouse he’d driven them out to in the middle of the night, just so that his delirious Omega could check on his dogs. *When the time comes, I hope you’d do anything for me*.

***

‘Dr Carson Nahn. He’s the psychiatric attending at Western General.’

Alana Bloom identifies the latest victim for them, and she has to pause to take a deep breath before she can continue,

‘He interviewed Dr Gideon for the same psychopathy survey I participated in, two years ago.’

They’re in the morgue at Quantico. The body was found after lunch and brought here for forensic analysis. Jack stands near Dr Carruthers, with Zeller and Bloom at Nahn’s head. Will lingers at the side, trying to keep his distance from the sharp memories of violence still hovering around the bodies.

He’s not sure how he ended up here today… He’d struggled to wake up this morning, and Hannibal had washed and dressed him… Had driven him to work at Will’s *insistence* that he was needed on the case, and then… The day is a blur.

It’s evening now, but he’s not sure what happened between Hannibal leaving and Jack calling him into the lab. Doesn’t know where he’s been, who he’s talked to…

Will can feel his sweater and shirt plastered to his skin, and his boxers are wet with slick. He practically drowned his eyes in Inhibitor drops when he saw how gold they were, but they still seem bright, so he keeps his head ducked as he listens to the details of the wound.

‘Total frenectomy,’ Zeller says, gesturing to Nahn’s throat. ‘Webbing under the tongue, even the connective tissue all the way into the throat is cut free and pulled through for the, er… *desired* effect.’

Jack sighs, drawing closer.

‘Still no word from Dr Chilton?’ he checks, and Alana shakes her head.

‘He hasn’t answered his phone since yesterday. Didn’t show up to work today.’ She looks over at Will, worry creasing her brow.

Chilton… Right… Will drags himself out of his self-pity, forcing his brain to think, to work, and tries to squint beyond the shimmering air in front of his face.

'Gideon wants to lure the Ripper,' he says, using the spikes of pain down his neck and through his temples to help him concentrate. 'He's going to offer up the man who disrespected both their identities.'

'Every detail of Dr Carruthers's murder, as described meticulously in Freddy Lounds's article, has been *faithfully* reproduced, *except* for one.' Jack pulls back the autopsy sheet, revealing the bloodied, sawed off stump of an arm.

What do you see? Do you feel guilty, Jack? You should…

Will's shadow croons, rumbling a deep, distant laugh as it slithers around his neck and down into his chest. *I know this… Why do I know this?*

'What's different about Carson?' Alana asks. 'Why amputate *his* arm?'

'Freddy write anything about this?' Jack asks, but Zeller shakes his head.

'Not that I know of, no.'

My design… Realization is a moment of sweet relief from the pain in his body, and Will speaks quickly.

'Abel Gideon didn't kill this man,' he says, his eyes wandering from the body to Jack. 'The Chesapeake *Ripper* did.'

That gets Jack's attention, though it is Alana who replies,

'You said the Chesapeake Ripper would wanna *kill* Gideon for taking credit for his work…'

The answer tickles the back of his mind, and Will screws his eyes shut so that he can concentrate; so that he can *think*. God, it's so *hot* in here… So bright and he feels so very, very vulnerable…

'But Gideon isn't *alone* anymore,' he manages, concentrating on the kill, on the dark current swirling around him; his lifeline. 'And the Ripper isn't going to risk *exposure*.' *He's too good a hunter for that. Too powerful*. 'So, no, he's… he's…' He almost laughs. 'He's *telling* us where to *catch* him.' He drops his head, frowning and smiling because it's perverted and cruel and *so*, so clever. 'Actually, he's telling *you*,' he says, looking up at Jack.

The Alpha frowns.

'Me?'

Will fights a purr, feeling his shadow dance behind his eyes.

'Where's the last place you saw a severed *arm*, Jack?'

***

Jack is quiet on the drive out to the observatory. Will stares out of the window, lost in the blurred trees flashing past. It's better this way; talking is difficult. It's bad enough that he has to be locked in a car, a small, confined space, with an Alpha other than Hannibal…

'I want you to wait outside,' Jack says quietly, dragging him back to the present. Will lets his head sway with the movement of the vehicle, trying to ride out the pain lancing through his skull.

'That's probably best,' he mumbles. Jack growls, his eyes flickering red as he tightens his grip on the steering wheel.

'You look like *hell*, Will.'

'I feel like hell,' Will mutters, but then, because it's not quite right, he corrects himself, his words slurring into each other. 'Actually, no, I feel… *fluid*… Like I'm… *spilling*…'

Like being in a warm bath… Dribbling over the edges… Spreading across for the floor… It would be nice, if not for the pain.

'Must've come down with something…' He rubs his eyes, trying to clear his fuzzy vision. 'I hope it's not contagious…'

'Look this work that we do…' Jack pauses, choosing his words. 'It will compromise your immune system, *if* you *allow* it. You *gotta* keep things in *perspective*. Gotta keep *yourself* in perspective.'

'My *self* is a little *hazy* at the moment,' Will points out, and Jack glares at him, worry tightening his jaw.

'You *gotta* start taking better care of yourself,' he says, echoing Hannibal's sentiment, and Will almost snorts a laugh.

I have an Alpha for that, Jack. And he's doing what he can. But he can't say that, so he just nods drowsily.

'Build my resistance.'

'You just *can't* take it all in,' Jack says, his voice cracking with frustration. 'You've *got* to let *go* of as *much* of it as you can. You just *gotta* let go.'

Brilliant advice, Jack… Not sure how relevant it is, though…

Will looks at his lap, rubbing damp fingertips together as he tries to think of how to explain it to the other man.

'It's hard to… shake off something that's… already under your skin.'

Waves lap at his head, pulling him down. The darkness catches him, and Will can feel himself swaying as he closes his eyes, breathing slowly and deeply. He's not going to pass out… He's just resting.

They arrive, and Jack gives him one last, exasperated look, before collecting his rifle and stepping out of the car. Will watches him go, but water runs down the windscreen, obscuring his view.

I wonder if that's warm, too?

He blinks slowly, drifting on nothingness, boneless and empty.

Alpha…

He's really empty… There's a pit inside him, an endless darkness that he needs to fill with Hannibal… *Where is he? Why isn't he here with me? Why aren't I with him?*

There's no air in the car. It's stuffy. Boiling. Like leaving a dog inside on a summer's day. *I just need to cool down. Just for a minute…*

Will fumbles for the door, half-falling out of the vehicle. Jack is already leading the way into the observatory. He should follow… He should… There are Alphas in there… He needs an Alpha… Needs *his* Alpha…

The raven stag snorts, catching his attention. *There you are*. Will stares at it, his heart racing. The stag will take him home… Take him to Hannibal…

I need my Alpha… I need him now.

There's a scent, very faint, but enough to make his mouth water. Will licks his lips, tasting it with the glands on the top of his mouth. *This way… My Alpha is this way…*

His thighs ache but he pushes on, trudging through the snow until he reaches a car at the edge of the woods. It's empty… Empty, but the scent is all *over* it. *God…*

Slick trickles down his thighs and Will rocks his hips down as he clambers into the backseat. He gets his gun out – there's a murderer on the loose – and his palm slides on the handle. Everything's dissolving into black and gold… He's burning up, his throat almost too swollen to breathe, making him dizzy with it, and then…

There you are… Alpha… My Alpha…

Abel Gideon gets behind the steering wheel, stilling with his hand on the ignition when he realizes he's not alone. He glances into the rearview mirror, at the golden eyes staring back at him, and takes a slow, deep breath of sweet Omega musk.

'I was *expecting* the Chesapeake Ripper,' he drawls, turning to look back at Will. 'Or are you he?'

Fear presses in on him and Will grits his teeth. Garrett Jacob Hobbs looks *awful*; rotting flesh, sunken cheeks and scuffed eyes… He's dead, he's dead, he's been dead for months and it's all *his* fault…

I killed you… My Alpha… I'm so sorry…

'Turn around,' he says hoarsely. 'Don't look at me.'

I can't stand it if you look at me. If you hate me for what I did to you…

Gideon turns back to the wheel, adjusting in his trousers because, as dull as the Omega's scent is, what he *does* smell is *divine*… Sweet and spicy, lingering on his tongue until he can feel drool wetting his chin. He wants to bury himself inside that hot, willing body and fuck and fuck until there's nothing left.

But not here… The Omega came to him… But he's not in heat; he can't be… And he has a gun trained on him. Gideon counts to five, slowing his breathing, pulling himself back from rut.

'You are looking a little *peaky*, Mr Graham,' he says, keeping an eye on him in the rearview mirror. 'If you don't mind my saying… I may be crazy, but you look *ill*. Or are you just due a heat? Hm?'

'Drive!' Will snarls, closing his eyes in an attempt to block out Hobbs's voice, the sound of it gnawing inside his brain, filling him. Owning him… Breaking him…

Gideon purrs, a low, deep rumble to soothe him, and Will mewls. He leans in the seat, baring his throat and spreading his legs wide, his crest pulsing. *Please… Please…*

He's never really been one for men, but Gideon could see himself making an exception for *this* one. He watches as the Omega paws at his shirt, trying to get his clothes off, and there's a brief moment where he actually considers abandoning all caution and climbing into the back with him. But then Will gets his shirt open, and Gideon sees the bite on his chest, a vicious ring of bloody teeth marks and a dark purple suck bruise, and his eyes prickle red at the warning. At the claim.

My, my… Aren't you bonded to a strong and aggressive Alpha…? They certainly ripped into you, didn't they…?

'Who *is* your Alpha?' he murmurs, drawing two golden, glowing eyes back to his face again. 'If you tell me, I'll take you to them.'

Will swallows, rasping a breath into tight lungs, and arches his spine as Gideon's voice sends pleasure crackling down to his balls. *Good… You're good… Thank you, Alpha…*

'Hannibal,' he gasps, reaching for his erection, wincing at how *wrong* it feels to touch himself. *Please… Please take me to him… Take me now… Please…* 'Hannibal Lecter.'

***

Climbing out of the car hurts his muscles and Will staggers, barely able to keep the gun pointed up towards Hobbs. His dead Alpha waits by the car, milky eyes locked on his face, watching him struggle.

Alpha… Alpha, please, I'm sorry…

The pain in his head is getting worse. Will can't *think*. He's on fire and his brain is boiling. He manages to push Hobbs in front of him, holding him in place with the muzzle of the gun, and knocks on the back door because he knows, if he can just *see* Hannibal, if he can just smell him and touch him and hear him, that everything will be alright. *It has to be…*

His Alpha's shadow appears in the frosted glass and then the door opens, spilling light over Will, bathing him in cedarwood, cloves and musk. Will grips onto the back of Hobbs's jacket, his knees buckling, his breath catching in his throat. It's so good, *so* good to see him…

'Alpha…'

I want you to bond me… Have you already bonded me? I brought you a present… Do you like it? I killed him… I killed him for you… To earn it… Did I earn it?

Hannibal looks at Gideon, and the other Alpha looks back, lifting one shoulder into a tiny 'what can you do?' shrug. Curious to know how his Omega came to be in possession of his imposter, Hannibal steps back, and Will brings his prey inside. They head into the dining room, and Hobbs sits at the end of the table, waiting.

I chose Hannibal, not you. Will bares his teeth at him, drawing closer to his mate, the air rippling in front of him when he sighs.

But he's still shaking. Still scared. Because something doesn't feel right, and the pain in his head isn't going down… It normally goes down… Being around Hannibal normally feels good, *really* good, but it's spiking again… His ears are ringing and he can taste blood…

'I'm having a hard time… thinking,' he manages, trying to focus on Hannibal. The Alpha shifts in and out of focus. The room shakes around him, melting in and out… Razors tickle across his crest, followed by feather, followed by silk, and then a needle slides inside his ear…

Hannibal watches Will judder, watches his Omega's eyes flicker between blue and gold, the pupils shrinking as sweat rolls down his forehead.

'I feel like I'm losing my mind,' Will rasps, his scent glands swollen to the size of grapes on either side of his neck. 'I… I-I don't know what's *real*…'

Please… Please… Will scoffs as his Alpha checks his watch, soft voice ringing out in the quiet room.

'It's 7.27pm, you're in Baltimore, Maryland, and your name is Will Graham.'

'No, I don't care *who* I am!' Will snarls, his voice breaking. 'Just tell me… if *he's* real…' He lifts up the gun and points it at Hobbs, at the rival Alpha he gave himself to, gave his mind to,

the one who is *infecting* him right now.

Oh, this is perfect… My clever, clever boy.

Hannibal purrs, and tilts his head as he looks around Will's shoulder, locking eyes with Gideon as the wary Alpha waits to see if he's about to be shot by a hallucinating, heat-mad Omega.

'Who do you see, Will?' Hannibal asks gently, feigning ignorance.

One final push, and into the madness you shall tumble… The darkness is waiting, Will, and I along with it.

Will pants, fighting his dizziness, the grey spots swarming in front of his eyes.

'Garrett Jacob Hobbs,' he whispers, staring at his dead mate, his victim. 'Who do *you* see?'

I see my copycat, Hannibal thinks, allowing his eyes to flick red for a moment, rewarded by the jump of his pulse in Gideon's throat. *I see my prize.*

'I don't see anyone,' he lies, and Gideon frowns, confused.

Will whines, scowling at Hobbs, his knuckles white from gripping the gun.

'*No*,' he moans. 'He's *right* there…'

'There's no one there, Will,' Hannibal says, and he's right, the air flickers, the pain spikes and Will sees an empty chair, empty space… God, he's going to be sick… He's going to collapse… It *hurts*…

'You're lying,' he gasps, lowering his arm because the muscles are tightening, spasming in and out as his spine starts to lock.

'We're alone, you came here alone,' Hannibal insists, sounding more and more frantic, drowned out by the buzzing, whining sound building in Will's ears. 'Do you remember coming here?'

'Please don't lie to me!' Will sobs, turning to his Alpha, his mate, screwing up his face as the whirring reaches a crescendo, splitting him apart.

'Garrett Jacob Hobbs is *dead*,' Hannibal says, raising his voice to cut through Will's panic. His Omega is struggling to breathe now, the blood draining from his face and leaving him deathly white under his dark, sweat-damp curls. 'You killed him. You watched him die.'

It's coming… It's coming…

'What's *happening* to me?' Will curls around himself, pressing at his eyes, trying to dig them out because it hurts, it *hurts* so *fucking* much and if he can just, if he can just… If he can just *make it stop*…

‘Will… *Will*… You’re going into heat, I want you to hand me the gun!’ Hannibal barks. But Will shudders, his scent souring with pain, and Hannibal’s skin crawls at how unnatural it is. How *wrong.* ‘Will, I want you to hand me your… Will?’

Hannibal grabs the gun just as Will convulses, pulling it from his clenching fingers before he shoots either of them by accident. Sets it on the mantlepiece and then takes hold of his Omega by the front of his throat, holding his head up. He reaches around and slides his hand under the collar of Will’s jacket, massaging his crest. *Come on, Will… Come on…*

His Omega’s eyes roll back and he falls into Hannibal’s arms as pleasure rips through him, grabbing on tight as he rocks against his Alpha’s body. Hannibal gives Gideon a warning look when he hears the other Alpha shift, reacting to the smell of seed as Will comes hard, and then he pushes his mate back to stand by himself, holding him under the chin so he won’t fall.

‘*That’s* it,’ he whispers, checking Will’s temperature. He’s feverish, his face flushed pink, pupils blowing wide and mouth going slack, groggy as sugary slick flows again.

’Hannibal…’

Satisfied that the danger has passed, Hannibal gives Will’s crest a final pinch, leaning in and kissing his ear.

‘*Stay*,’ he whispers, feeling Will nod against him. He retrieves the gun from the mantlepiece, inspecting it, and its clip full of bullets, and wanders towards the head of the table.

‘His heat triggered a mild seizure,’ he says calmly.

‘That… doesn’t seem to bother you,’ Gideon replies, eyes flicking from the twitching, heat-drugged Omega to the Alpha.

Hannibal raises an eyebrow.

‘I said it was mild.’

Since he doesn’t really have an answer to that, Gideon remains quiet.

Hannibal places the gun on the table next to him, sits down and clasps his hands before him, his burgundy eyes locked on the other Alpha.

‘Are you the man who claimed to be the Chesapeake Ripper?’ he asks, ignoring the way his gut clenches up at the tiny sounds of need coming from Will.

‘Why do you say “claimed”?’ Gideon asks, frowning in confusion. Hannibal narrows his eyes.

‘Because you’re not,’ he replies. ‘You know you’re not, and you don’t know much more about who you are beyond that.’

‘Are *you* the Ripper?’ Gideon asks, and Hannibal’s eyes gleam.

‘A terrible thing,’ he says quietly, ‘To have your identity taken from you…’

Gideon considers him for a moment, and then swallows.

‘Well, I’m taking it *back*,’ he says. ‘One piece at a time.’ Hannibal waits, and Gideon smirks. ‘You should see the pieces I got out of *my* psychiatrist.’

Will whimpers, reaching for him, and Hannibal knows he’s almost at his limit. The Omega needs his Alpha’s touch, soon, before he becomes too distressed and triggers another fit.

‘Alana Bloom was one of your psychiatrists, too,’ Hannibal says lightly. ‘Is that right?’

‘Yes… Dr Bloom,’ Gideon purrs, his eyes sparking with interest. Hannibal nods thoughtfully, and looks over to his mate. Holds out a hand and shifts his chair back as Will falls at him. The Omega drops to his knees at the touch on his shoulder, and buries his face in Hannibal’s lap, sucking up the scent of him, spreading his knees wide when Hannibal nudges his thighs apart. He doesn’t care that there’s another Alpha watching, doesn’t care that his head still hurts; all that matters is *tasting* Hannibal, taking his knot and his seed and filling himself with it.

Gideon feels his eyes widen. He can’t quite believe what he’s seeing… The Omega’s head drops below the table, followed by the telltale clink of a buckle and the sound of a zipper, and yet Hannibal’s expression remains eerily calm.

Perfect control… This is all a game to you.

‘I can tell you where to find her,’ Hannibal says, guiding Will to swallow him down, humming his satisfaction at the thrill of it. The power. He smiles at Gideon, his eyes flashing red as he tilts his head. ‘Would you like that?’

***

Coming back to himself isn’t easy. Will’s brain is gritty, all sharp edges and blistered surfaces making his jaw ache as he fights to keep from wincing. He can smell his Alpha, feel hands on him, and taste his seed in his mouth, but all he wants to do is *sleep*. He’s *so*, so tired…

‘Will, can you hear me?’ Hannibal watches Will’s pupils begin to react to the light again, and he leans in closer so that his Omega can focus on him. ‘Repeat after me: my name is Will Graham.’

‘My name is Will Graham,’ Will mumbles, panting because his lungs are full of hot sludge and don’t seem to be doing their job properly.

‘Raise both of your arms,’ Hannibal says, guiding his Omega to obey until Will’s hands are at either side of his head. ‘More… more… Good.’ He lets Will lower them, but keeps him at a distance when his mate lists closer, seeking the comfort of a hug. ‘Although you may not feel like it, I need you to smile.’

Will looks up at him, taking a moment to understand the instruction, and then curves his lips into what it perhaps the worst smile Hannibal has ever seen on him. He can’t help but smile

back, though, because it's *Will*, and he strokes his Omega's cheek as a reward for good behavior.

'Good.' He leans in and kisses him gently. 'It wasn't a stroke.' He squeezes his shoulder, helping him down as Will sinks onto one of the dining chairs, and then takes the seat next to him. 'You may have had a seizure. Tell me the last thing you remember.'

'I…' Will sucks in his breath and whips his head around, staring at the end of the table, to the empty chair where he was sure, he was *so* sure Hobbs had been… 'I was with Garrett Jacob Hobbs,' he says, tilting forwards again, glancing at Hannibal for help.

Hannibal cups Will's forehead, pushing his hair back to check how hot he feels. Will *has* to realize this is heat soon; no point hiding it now. Perhaps, if he *knows*, he'll stop fighting it.

'You have a fever,' Hannibal says. 'You were hallucinating. You thought he was alive. Here, in the room with you.'

'I *saw* him,' Will insists, but Hannibal shakes his head.

'He's a delusion, disguising reality.' Leans in closer, catching Will's eye. 'Don't let *that* let you slip away.'

He stands, and strides towards the chair at the head of the table. *Now for the trap.*

'You killed Garrett Jacob Hobbs once; you can find a way to kill him again,' he says, picking up the coat he has left there and pulling it on. Will whimpers, reaching forwards because Hannibal is getting ready to leave. To leave *him*.

'Where are you going?' he asks hoarsely, and Hannibal turns away to hide his smirk. *Always so predictable, Will.*

'Abel Gideon is still at large,' he replies, smoothing out the collar. 'He mutilated Dr Chilton. They found him, clinging to life. I'm worried about Alana.'

He pulls out his car keys and sets them, beside the gun, on the dining table. And Will, his sweet, protective Will, tries to get up, to come with him.

'Alana…'

'No, no, no, Will. You're in no state to go *anywhere*.' Hannibal hurries around the table, pushing Will back into the seat. 'You should stay here until I return. I'll call Jack.'

As he steps back, he gives Will a gentle tug, undoing the physical command he gave to his Omega. Disappears into the kitchen and then waits for the inevitable scrape of chairs legs, running footsteps and the sound of the door shutting as his Omega takes the bait; takes the car keys and the gun, and goes to hunt down Abel Gideon. For him.

Wandering back into the dining room, Hannibal sets his cell phone down, watching the timer count down to zero. When it does, he'll get in a cab and go after him. Find him, victorious,

over Gideon's cooling corpse, take him home and induce a nice, long heat, and then Will can start to feel much, much better.

We still have time.

***

Will parks Hannibal's Bentley down the street from Alana's house and scrambles out, half-crawling through the snow towards Gideon. The Alpha is just stood, half-hidden in the shadows, watching Alana move around her house. He doesn't bother to turn, ignoring the heat-drunk Omega approaching from behind.

Will brings the gun up, taking aim, but his arms are shaking and he'll likely miss from this distance. He can't… He can't do it from here…

Alpha…

He sighs, giving it up as a bad idea, and staggers over to stand beside Gideon. The other man doesn't seem threatening anymore; there's a sadness to him, a *resigned* feeling… It's confusing, and Will blinks, trying to clear his hazy, wavering vision. He's exhausted… He just wants to go home…

'I don't know if I will *ever* be *myself* again,' Gideon says, still watching Alana read through a case file. 'I don't know if I've got any *self* left over.' He huffs. 'I spent so long thinking I was *him*… It got *really* hard to remember who I was when I *wasn't* him…'

Will turns, staring at his Alpha, at Hobbs, wondering how he *ever* got out of his head… He got so lost inside him…

'Who are you now?' he whispers, his heart skipping a beat when Hobbs turns to him and smiles.

'Now I'm *you*,' the Alpha says.

Waves of heat chase pain up his spine and Will shakes, but Hobbs is still speaking. *Gideon* is still speaking…

'We're both here, because of him… Just those kind of people who shouldn't *be* in a relationship…' Gideon smiles bitterly. 'You and I are *already* committed. It's hard to be with another person when you can't get out of your own head.'

'I want to get out,' Will gasps, closing his eyes against the rocking, tilting world. He's falling… sinking… *fading*…

'Yeah, well…' Gideon sniffs. 'We all want things that we can't have.' He straightens, considering. 'But if I *kill* her, like *he* would kill her, maybe I could understand him better…'

Hobbs sneers at him, his dead skin glowing in the moonlight.

'I wonder if, then, you would *finally* understand what you've become…?'

No… No… I'm not… I've not become anything… I'm not you… I'm nothing like you…

Hannibal's scent fills his nose. Will can hear his voice in his mind, urging him to do it. Telling him how *proud* he is…

Do it now.

He raises the gun, point blank range. No missing. Watches Gideon's eyes widen, flickering red as he realizes what's about to happen. There's a pause, a moment of silence, and then…

I'm yours.

Leaning against his Bentley, Hannibal smiles when he hears the gunshot. Perfect timing.

But the sound of pain he hears afterwards, the high, keening scream only an Omega can make, chills him to the bone, and he's running, shouting, before he's even aware of what he's doing.

'Will! *Will!'*

At the sound of a gun, Alana darts to her window, just in time to see Will fall to his knees and then pitch forwards next to Gideon's body. Even from here she can see the steam rising from him, see where he's melting the snow as he convulses.

'Will!'

She shouts to him as she races from the house, slipping on the icy path, and crashes down next to him. Grabs for him, horrified at the *heat* of him, at the *sweat* pouring from his skin and the way his gold eyes roll back in their sockets.

'Get away from him!'

Hannibal snarls at Alana when he sees her touching his mate, and he shoves her, hard, knocking her onto her back. Gathers Will up into his arms, holding him tight as the Omega shudders. Will is choking, frothing at the mouth, and the smell rising from him is burnt, bitter and tainted.

'Will! *Will*, come back to me…'

'*Hannibal*!' Alana gets back to her feet, her heart racing as she realizes, as she *understands* the Alpha's fury. She reaches for Hannibal and he growls, his eyes blazing crimson as he hunches lower around Will's juddering body. His *mate's* juddering body.

'He's in heat,' he says, fumbling to push Will's jacket off, tearing his shirt to get at his crest, stripping the layers from his body. 'I need to get him home.'

The FBI agent comes running, already calling for backup and ERT for Gideon and Will. Alana tries again, a tear trickling down her cheek when she sees the proof of their bond; a swollen, tender crest on the back of Will's neck.

‘*Hannibal*,’ she calls, her voice wobbling. ‘He needs the hospital. *Now*. Look at him; this isn’t right.’

‘Will…’ Hannibal cradles the Omega to him, stroking his crest over and over, trying to ground him in pleasure. Will spasms again, his teeth bared and jaw locked, and he arches, arms falling out to either side of him. Hannibal shifts, still holding tight to the back of his neck, and Will chokes on a sob before he collapses, unconscious.

‘Will, no, *no*!’ Hannibal lowers him to the ground and rolls him onto his side, checking his pulse. Weak but there… ‘Stay with me… Stay with me.’

‘The ambulance is on its way,’ Alana says, her teeth chattering.

Hannibal doesn’t reply; just shrugs out of his coat so that he can enfold Will in his scent. He kneels beside him in the snow, hunched over to protect him, and strokes his hair as they wait for help.

Please hold on, Will… Hold on.

***

Alone together in the waiting room, Alana hands Hannibal a cup of coffee from the vending machine and then sits down beside him.

‘When did you bond him?’ she asks, glancing sideways at the exhausted Alpha.

Hannibal looks down at his reflection in the dark liquid, at the shadows beneath his red-ringed eyes and the bright spots of color on his cheeks. Will has been admitted, but the emergency team need to get his temperature down before they can move him up to the ward.

He sighs, tapping the sides of the paper cup, and offers Alana a shaky smile.

‘That night I was attacked by another Alpha,’ he says, a moment’s satisfaction in the flicker of surprise in Alana’s blue eyes. ‘He was challenging me for Will.’

‘You did what any victorious Alpha would do,’ Alana says, and bows her head. She releases a slow breath, her scent warm with what Hannibal *knows* is jealousy. ‘You haven’t told Jack, have you?’

‘No.’ Hannibal takes a sip of coffee, hiding his grimace at how repulsive it is. ‘Will isn’t ready to announce it, yet. He doesn’t want it interfering with his work.’

‘And now he’s in heat,’ Alana says heavily, stirring her drink.

‘And now he’s in heat…’ Hannibal sits back, trying to stretch the ache from his muscles. It’s late, but he needs to check in with Jack, to tell him what’s happened. Needs to keep up appearances. ‘Did you know he’d been taking heat suppressants for five years?’

‘I knew he was taking them… I didn’t know for how long,’ Alana replies. She rubs her forehead and sniffs. ‘Is that what caused the seizure?’

‘It could be,’ Hannibal says. ‘Or it could be something else entirely.’

Alana huffs in frustration, setting her cup down and twining her hands together.

‘How could I have missed this?’ She shakes her head, leaning forwards with her elbows on her knees, staring at the floor. ‘He didn’t *smell* like he was in heat, but there must have been *something*… Some *sign* or clue…’

‘You know as well as I do that Will is difficult to predict,’ Hannibal says, setting his cup down as well and reaching across to rub her shoulders. ‘And, no doubt he’s been coating himself in that Beta spray you bought for him.’

Alana looks up at him, groaning at her own involvement in Will’s current condition. Before she can speak again, however, the attending doctor appears in the doorway.

‘Dr Lecter?’

‘Yes.’ Hannibal gets to his feet, smoothing out his suit jacket.

‘You’re Mr Graham’s Alpha?’ the attending checks, and waits for Hannibal’s nod before he continues, ‘We’ve stabilized him, and he’s being brought up now. He’s sedated, and on IV fluids for the dehydration.’

Alana comes to stand next to Hannibal, her face drawn with worry.

‘What’s wrong with him?’

The doctor grimaces.

‘His white blood cell count is twice normal, and he was admitted with a temperature of 105,’ he replies. ‘We’re running some more tests.’

If only you knew what to look for, Hannibal thinks. He takes a step closer.

‘I’d like to see him.’ The doctor nods.

‘Of course. He’s this way.’ He shows Hannibal and Alana down the corridor to a private room across from the nurse’s station, and then takes his leave.

Hannibal enters first, dropping his coat onto the sofa beneath the internal window. Will is still flushed, but he is lying quietly in the bed, attached to an IV drip and monitors. His heartrate is fast but steady and, when Hannibal scans his chart, he sees that his temperature has settled at 102. Still high, but usual for a mid-heat Omega.

‘You should stay with him,’ Alana whispers, giving the Alpha’s elbow a squeeze. ‘I’ll sort the dogs and pack him a bag…’

‘No,’ Hannibal says, turning away from the sight of his unconscious mate. ‘I’ll do it. I need to let Jack what’s happened, anyway.’

‘Are you sure?’ Alana chews her lip. ‘I mean… I can sit with him, if you want?’

Hannibal nods, not trusting himself to speak. He can’t watch as the Beta moves to take the seat beside Will’s bed, but he still sees the movement from the corner of his eye and he knows that Alana has taken Will’s hand in both of her own, comforting him while he sleeps.

‘Thank you,’ he manages, his throat very tight. ‘Will is lucky to have you as his friend.’

‘He’s lucky to have you as his mate,’ Alana replies, smiling up at him. ‘If he wakes before you get back, what should I tell him?’

Hannibal pauses in the doorway, midway through pulling on his coat. He smiles.

‘Tell him he made me proud.’

***

Sharing a whiskey with Jack in his office after explaining Will’s fever and admittance to hospital, Hannibal looks down in an act of calculated hesitation. The heat seizures are the perfect excuse to persuade the Alpha of Will’s instability. His *dangerous* instability…

‘Jack… I would recommend you suspend his license to carry firearms,’ he says softly.

Jack snorts a laugh and shakes his head.

‘You and I are just gonna have to have a difference of opinion about who Will is, doctor,’ he replies, and Hannibal can barely keep from baring his teeth.

‘I *know* who Will is,’ he says. *Far better than you ever could.* ‘Will *knows* who he is.’

‘Yes.’ Jack nods, sipping his drink.

‘But our experiences shape us, Jack,’ Hannibal says, and he sees Jack’s confidence in Will falter. Time for a little push. ‘How is this experience going to shape Will?’

You’re already turning against him, Jack… And you don’t even realize it.

***

Relevés

Chapter Summary

After Georgia Madchen is burned to death in her hyperbaric chamber, Will realizes that several recent murders were all the work of a copycat, and that Georgia was killed because she may have remembered who killed Dr Sutcliffe. Starting at the beginning to recreate the killer's thinking, Will takes Abigail back to the hunting lodge in Minnesota, but the stress triggers his heat and he hallucinates that he kills her. Hannibal tells Jack that Will is disassociating, becoming Garrett Jacob Hobbs, convincing him that the Omega is very mentally ill.

Chapter Notes

Hey peeps! Oh my goodness... Okay, first of all, a HUGE apology that this took so long to write and post! Life has been pretty crazy over the last few weeks, and I've just not had much time to settle in and get it done.

However, I have already made a start on Chapter 13, so YAY for that!

As always, I hope you enjoy, and thank you SO MUCH for sticking with this so far! You're the best motivation and muse a writer could ask for! xxx

After two days in bed, Will needs to move. His headache has faded to a dull ache, and although he's still exhausted, there's also a crackling, restless energy filling him with the urge to *do something*. Hannibal's not due to visit again until this evening, and Alana saw him this morning, which gives him three hours to fill.

Wriggling his feet into his slippers, Will wraps himself in the new dressing gown Hannibal bought for him. He'll go for a walk.

The Omega Unit at this hospital might not be as luxurious as the one at the Noble Hills Medical Center, but at least it's not *quite* as patronizing, and he manages to get into the intensive care ward without issue, just a few gentle smiles from the nurses that he walks past, moving slowly and leaning heavily against his IV stand.

I see you…

His shadow curls around his neck, settling like a python over his shoulders as Will pushes open the inner doors to the room housing Georgia Madchen's hyperbaric chamber. The other

Omega is curled on her side, resting as her body continues to heal. She looks very small and very young, but she still manages a smile when she wakes, and mouths a ‘hi’ at him from behind the glass.

Will smiles back, searching for the microphone so that they can speak. He dips his head, purring softly to calm her, to ease some of her pain.

‘You look better.’

‘Do I look alive?’ Georgia teases, but the self-loathing in her gold-ringed eyes cuts at Will.

‘You look *pretty*,’ he replies.

Georgia blushes, and looks down, fiddling with her blond hair. The skin grafts on her arm have taken well, and new skin is growing over the stitches. She’ll be scarred but, eventually, that part of her will be whole again.

‘Must be all the oxygen,’ she replies, and Will chuckles. Georgia frowns, chewing her lip. She can see the strain around his eyes, the tightness of his jaw. ‘They say what’s wrong with you?’ she asks, nodding to the IV stand. Will sighs and shakes his head, trying to ignore the worry cramping his gut.

‘No; just the heat fever.’ He glances away and shrugs. ‘They’re trying to find out what else, since I’m on suppressants and it didn’t present like normal.’

‘They won’t find anything,’ Georgia says, cutting at him with the *emptiness* of her words. She sighs. ‘They’ll keep looking, keep taking tests, keep giving false diagnoses… bad meds…’ She shakes her head. ‘But they won’t find out what’s wrong. They’ll just know that *you’re* wrong.’

See?

The whisper is *inside* him, a corruption he can’t dig out no matter how much he tries. It’s a part of him…

Georgia huffs, smiling bitterly.

‘I hope your Alpha has good insurance,’ she says, and Will rolls his eyes, because *of course* Hannibal is paying… Now that he’s bonded, Dr Hannibal Lecter is his legal guardian… *My owner*...

‘I do, too,’ he mutters, but before he can dwell too much on his social captivity, Georgia speaks again.

‘They’re going to give me shock treatment,’ she says, trying to hide the wobble in her voice. ‘Electroconvulsive therapy is what it’s called…’ She looks down, fighting a shiver. ‘Shock treatment sounds nicer.’

Will draws closer to the chamber, his eyes flickering gold.

‘People who have what you have can recover with shock treatment,’ he says gently. Georgia rolls her eyes.

‘Do you know how many times I’ve been told I could recover with treatment?’ she says, and Will can’t help but glance away, half-nodding because it’s true; her mother told him that, for years, there was always something new, something better… And none of it worked.

‘They said I might remember what I did,’ Georgia continues, and there’s a *definite* whimper in her voice now. Her eyes flood gold, whites bloodshot and irises tawny from the infections still raging inside her, and she shakes her head. ‘But I don’t *wanna* remember.’

‘You know what you *did*, Georgia,’ Will murmurs, forcing himself to meet her gaze, to *deal* with it. Georgia shakes her head again.

‘But I don’t *remember* it,’ she whispers, winding a hand under her head to squeeze the nape of her neck. To touch the smooth, unblemished skin where a crest *used* to be, until it flaked away with the death of Beth LeBeau… ‘Feels more like a horrible dream where I *killed* my *Alpha*.’

A tear rolls down her cheek and Will blinks away the hotness in his own eyes. Swallows past the lump in his throat so that he can speak, because he has to ask. He has to know…

‘You dream about killing anyone else?’

Dr Sutcliffe, maybe?

Georgia scoffs, brushing the wetness away.

‘I dreamed *you* killed that doctor,’ she says. ‘But I couldn’t see your face…’

Will holds very still, his heart racing and sweat sticking his t-shirt to his skin. Beverly checked him… She scanned him and he was clean. But he’d been out of it. He’d lost time… *No...*

Fear tickles across his crest, and Will fights nausea. Georgia’s sick; she’s still sick… She’s confused… She *has* to be confused…

I didn’t kill him... I couldn’t have... Could I?

***

Hannibal’s breath ghosts over his ear, sending shivers down his spine. Wil dips his head lower so that his Alpha can see the curve of his neck, winding thread around the lure they’re creating together. *You said I could teach you how to fish, if you taught me how to cook...*

He knows it’s a dream, and it’s dissolving even as he turns in his seat to kiss the other man, but it’s the *feeling* that stays with him. That he’s safe and loved… *Cherished*…

Will smiles as he wakes, looking down the length of the bed until Hannibal comes into focus. His Alpha is lifting the lids from two bowls and a rich, aniseed scent rises into the air. Will

makes a show of sniffing and then purrs.

‘Smells delicious,’ he murmurs. He’s still tired, and his fever had spiked again after visiting Georgia, but having Hannibal here, knowing he’s going to stay with him through the night, soothes the empty ache inside him. Makes him able to ignore the pain in his temples.

‘Silkie chicken in a broth,’ Hannibal replies, tapping off the condensation. ‘A black-boned bird, prized in China for its medicinal values since the 7th century. Wolfberries, ginseng, ginger, red dates and star anise.’

Will manages to push himself up onto his elbows, a warm, fluttery feeling in his chest as he marvels at the *effort* his mate puts into what he cares about.

‘You made me chicken soup,’ he says, quietly awed.

Hannibal turns, giving him a bland look as his Omega successfully turns an elaborate, three-hour dish into something commonly found in a can.

‘Yes.’

He turns and carries the bowls to the table beneath the window as Will struggles out of bed. His mate is still very weak, and no doubt his earlier excursion exhausted him. Hannibal dresses the table while he waits, and then removes his coat, hanging it on the door hook out of the way.

Sinking into the chair across from his Alpha, Will reaches out with a trembling hand to touch the little wrapped chicken foot on his plate… *Always with the fine details*, he thinks, and he feels a rush of affection for his Alpha. He scoops up a spoonful of broth, then another, gulping it down because it tastes as delicious as it smells and he’s *ravenous*.

‘The nurses tell me you’ve been wandering, Will,’ Hannibal says, a note of warning in his tone. He places travel cups on the table so that he can pour them each a coffee from their espresso machine at home.

‘I was awake,’ Will mutters, his spoon hovering near the bowl so as not to spill any food. ‘And wandering with *purpose*. And good intentions.’

‘Visiting that unfortunate Omega suffering from delusions,’ Hannibal replies. Will hums around a mouthful of chicken.

‘She’s my support group,’ he says; a bitter joke about his own state of mind. Hannibal doesn’t smile, and Will feels a flicker of guilt; his Alpha is clearly still too worried to make jokes.

‘And I hope you’re hers,’ Hannibal says. ‘Nothing more isolating than mental illness.’

Leaving his words to twist the knife between Will’s ribs, Hannibal takes a bite of chicken, savoring the sweet and smoky flavors. He watches surreptitiously as Will pauses, lowering his spoon as his fear, his *desperation*, gets the better of him. The Omega sits back in the

chair, making the wood creak in an echo of their very first meal together, and takes a slow, shaky breath.

‘The hallucinations, the… loss of time… sleepwalking…’ Will swallows, almost losing the nerve to ask, his heart jumping in his throat. But he has to; he *has* to, just in case… ‘Could that have all just been the fever? Heat prodrome?’

Please… Please…

Hannibal sighs at his mate’s cleverness, but they’ve come too far to let all their hard work go to waste, and he keeps his gaze lowered as he says heavily,

‘Fevers can be symptoms of dementia.’ He glances up, waiting until Will nods, resigned to the inevitable bad news, before adding, ‘Dementia can be a symptom of many things happening in your body or mind that can no longer be ignored, Will.’

Things like your dark potential… I will no longer allow you to ignore it, no matter how much you hate me for what I must do.

His disappointment is so sudden and sharp that Will can’t breathe. It feels like a kick in the gut, a twinge that rises up from between his legs, and he has to lower his head as he nods, clamping his lips tightly closed to keep from crying. When he looks up, he feels his eyes flash gold, hazy with tears, and he’s only too happy to lose himself in the intensity of his Alpha’s gaze.

‘Does Jack know?’ he asks, his voice wobbling.

‘That this could be more than a simple fever? No.’ Hannibal shakes his head, sitting back because his heartbeat has faltered, and he needs a moment to regain his composure. Will is so *very* afraid, and, with everything that’s happened over the last few days, all he wants to do is comfort and protect him. Dumbly instinctive; he has to remind himself that these actions *are* helping Will… *A little pain now for greater pleasure later.* ‘I haven’t told him about our bond, or that it was a heat.’

Will looks puzzled.

‘Shouldn’t you?’

‘Not until you’re ready, and we know for certain,’ Hannibal replies, eating more broth. At Will’s thoughtful little hum, he straightens in his seat. ‘What we must do *now* is continue to support and monitor your recovery,’ he says. He fiddles with his napkin, pitching his voice to be deliberately casual as he asks, ‘This Omega you were visiting… how’s *her* recovery?’

Will shakes his head around his coffee.

‘I don’t think she *wants* to recover,’ he says. ‘Afraid to remember what she did.’

Hannibal pauses, gently blowing to cool his own drink before taking a sip.

‘Can’t say I blame her,’ he murmurs. ‘What Omega would want such an atrocity on their conscience?’

See…?

Will’s dark shadow slithers inside his ear, licking fire across his forehead. He hears his heart skip a beat, feels sweat bead on his brow and, for just a second, he remembers shooting Garrett Jacob Hobbs. Remembers ripping him apart with bullets and leaving him to drown in his own blood in the corner of his kitchen. *My mate…*

‘What are your thoughts on the theory of Omega Imprinting?’ he asks, glancing up at Hannibal. At his Alpha. His *real* mate.

Hannibal hides his smirk, feigning surprise, and sets his coffee down. Naturally, Will took the bait. He’d been so *very* close to Garrett Jacob Hobbs, after all.

‘It’s a relatively new field of study,’ he muses. ‘Recently gaining support from psychologists as more is understood about Alpha and Omega biology.’ He gestures for Will to eat as he talks, and smiles when Will obeys. ‘The theory holds that every Omega imprints on the first Alpha that they form an intense, emotional connection to… A pseudo-bond, you might say.’

‘And it can, er, *simulate* the psychological elements of a true bond,’ Will says, his spoon already halfway to his lips before he’s finished swallowing. He misses the red glint in the Alpha’s eye.

‘If an Omega *were* to imprint on an Alpha, without mating, then, yes, that Omega might start to display certain *bonded* characteristics,’ Hannibal says. ‘It might mimic the ability to sense the Alpha’s thoughts and feelings… Influence the Omega to defend or *do* things for that Alpha…’

Will hums, drinking more coffee.

‘But, when they mate, the new bond would replace it?’ he checks, and Hannibal makes him wait for a moment as he eats more broth.

‘Perhaps,’ he says lightly, enjoying the flash of panic on Will’s face, the tang of salt in his scent.

It did, it did…And even if it didn’t, he’s dead…There’s no way I’m still connected to Hobbs… It was just the fever… I’m not even sure that I did Imprint on him…

Will’s mind scrabbles to deny his connection… The reason his dead Alpha haunts him. Why he hallucinates him *so* vividly… Why he remembers showering, *knowing* that Hobbs was showering… Remembers eating and wishing his Alpha was more than just a ghost in the space beside him, because Hobbs was too far away. So very far away…

‘Of course,’ Hannibal continues, speaking to his bowl, ‘most Omegas bond to the same Alpha with whom they Imprint, so not much is known about the possibility of parallel

bonds.' He grins up at Will. '*Especially* in male Omegas, since they're so rarely left unbonded past their first heat.'

Will blushes and scowls at the net curtains beside him, his knee bouncing. His father had been offered hundreds of thousands of dollars as a dowry for him when he'd turned sixteen… He *knew* Bill Graham had been sorely tempted. Who wouldn't? His debts cleared and no heat-stricken Omega teenager to deal with…

'Yeah,' he mutters. 'We're a *valuable* commodity. How could I forget?'

'Coveted,' Hannibal purrs, reaching out to take his hand. 'And *you* are *mine.*'

Will takes a sharp breath at the claim, dropping the spoon with a clink against the bowl. He huffs and ducks his head, blushing again, but he can't stop the little smile from tugging at his lips.

'Yeah,' he mumbles, twining his fingers with Hannibal's. 'I'm yours.'

Hannibal thinks back to his conversation with his own therapist. *Your madness is as valuable as oil; I want to contain the spill, to channel and tame it. Use it to fuel your becoming… My monster… My mate*.

***

Will wakes in Hannibal's arms the next morning. His Alpha is behind him, curled around the Omega's smaller body with one arm beneath his neck and the other draped over his hip; both possessive and protective. Hannibal's breath stirs his hair, and Will smiles at the feel of it. He dips his chin, baring his crest to his mate, and peppers Hannibal's knuckles with light kisses to let him know that he's no longer sleeping. The other man is an early riser; no doubt he's already showered and eaten, then returned to the wide bed just to comfort Will.

There's a moment of quiet and then Hannibal's deep purrs fill the space between them, rattling up from behind his ribcage to vibrate deep inside Will's chest. The sound of it is like molten gold, filling him until he's nothing but soft light. Will turns in the embrace, searching out Hannibal's lips, and they kiss gently, careful not to something either of them can finish. Hands spread across warm chests, on top of Hannibal's cashmere sweater and Will's cotton t-shirt, sliding through soft hair to tangle in curls and massage a scalp.

Hannibal hums as the kiss ends, his eyes half-lidded as a lazy smile on his lips as he draws back to look down at his mate.

'Good morning, Will.'

'Good morning, Hannibal.' Will grins at the duality of the formality and the fondness in their greeting. He snuggles closer, burrowing into Hannibal's shoulder and sucking up his scent. 'Mm… Freshly washed. What time did you get up?'

'I returned to bed an hour ago,' Hannibal replies. He curls an arm around Will's waist, tucking him in close to the side of his body. With the other hand, he marks the page of his

book before setting it aside. ‘I took the liberty of ordering you breakfast, but I’m afraid I cannot join you. I have an early morning client.’

‘What time is it now?’ Will asks, his voice still soft with the sleep tugging at his eyes. He’s tempted to doze on Hannibal until his Alpha has to leave, but he’d rather get up now and spend time talking to him, and nap later if he needs to.

‘Seven o’clock. I have to leave in twenty minutes.’

‘You’ll check on the dogs?’ Will asks, risking a doe-eyed look up at his Alpha. Hannibal smiles, and strokes an errant curl back from Will’s forehead before leaning down to kiss him.

‘Of course.’

He feels Will tense, and moves to allow him to sit up. Pushing down the bed rail, Hannibal moves to fetch Will’s dressing gown, waiting patiently as Will disentangles the IV feeds and wires, feeding them through the silk-lined sleeves before wrapping the thick material around his slim frame.

‘I *have* a robe,’ Will mutters, resting on the edge of the bed. ‘You didn’t have to buy me a new one.’

‘A simple gift, to wish you a speedy recovery,’ Hannibal replies, reaching out to straighten one of the velvet lapels. ‘The color suits you.’

‘I’m not going to get home to find all of my clothes replaced with special *Omega* branded suits, am I?’ Will teases, his lip curling into a wonky smile as he quirks an eyebrow at Hannibal. The Alpha adopts an air of innocence, and Will groans. ‘You’ve already bought me something, haven’t you?’ he asks, leaning over to poke Hannibal in the ribs. ‘I *know* that look…’ He huffs, and shakes his head, feeling a true flicker of irritation warring with affectionate disgruntlement. ‘I’m not a *doll*, Hannibal… I wear *what* I want, *when* I want.’

‘Of course,’ Hannibal says. He turns, anticipating the knock at the door, and opens it. ‘Ah. Breakfast.’ He takes the tray from the assistant, and places it on the table before the window. Lifts the plastic cover to reveal scrambled eggs on toast, a pot of coffee, yoghurt and a bowl of fruit. ‘Will. Come and eat.’

‘Are you wishing you’d been able to cook for me?’ Will teases, shuffling closer and sinking down into the chair with a pained sigh. He scoops up a forkful of eggs, barely chewing before rinsing his mouth with coffee. ‘I know I am.’

‘I have something very special planned for you, once you’re well,’ Hannibal says. He checks his watch, and a frown touches his brow before he sighs. ‘I have to go.’ Leaning down, he strokes Will’s unruly hair and presses a kiss to his temple, his forehead and then his cheek, before Will turns to capture his lips in a lingering kiss that has them both purring by the time Hannibal pulls away.

‘Mmm… You just make breakfast tastier,’ Will says, blue eyes sparkling. He takes a bite of toast, watching as his Alpha collects his overnight bag, coat and scarf from the couch. ‘Give

the dogs some fuss, won't you?'

'I will treat them as if they were my own,' Hannibal says. He drapes his scarf around his neck before pulling on his coat. Neglects to say that, if they *were* his dogs, they would live outside in kennels and be used as hunting dogs… A practical reason for the animals, not simply as companions… But, Will needs this, and he wants to care for his mate. Thus, he will feed, water and exercise the creatures. He does have limits, however. 'Fussing' is out of the question. 'Be sure to rest.'

'I'll see you later,' Will replies, picking through the bowl of fruit. 'Same time as usual?'

'Earlier, if I can,' Hannibal says, turning at the door. 'I'm hoping to be here by six. Take care of yourself, Will.'

Will hums, refusing to allow himself to watch as his Alpha leaves the room. If he watches, he'll miss him, and if he misses him too much…

Taking a slow, deep breath, Will turns back to his eggs. He's not particularly hungry; being away from Hannibal switches off his interest in everything, but he knows that's just an instinctive response, and no way to live his life, so he continues to eat until the plate it clear. He's about to take the last swig of coffee when he catches a part of the nurses' conversation on their way past his open door. Hannibal must have forgotten to close it…

' – fire in the hyperbaric chamber. FBI are in there, now.'

Will freezes, a tingle racing from his scalp to his toes. His heart leaps into his throat and he has to set the cup down before he drops it, his hand suddenly numb.

Georgia…

He's halfway out the door before he remembers his Beta spray – Beverly's team will be there, and he can't afford to lose his job. Will growls to himself and douses himself in pheromones, knocking back a couple of the heat suppressants hidden in his coat pocket and squeezing Inhibitor drops into his eyes to hide the gold as he makes his way, as fast as he can, to Georgia's room.

Please let it be a mistake… Please let her be alright…

'Will…' Jack turns in the doorway, anger and disappointment carved into the lines of his face. It's like a punch, and Will swallows down a growl at what he can sense from the Alpha. Jack's not sad that the Omega is dead; he's frustrated that he's lost his suspect.

Will looks past him to the blackened, shriveled body that Zeller and Price are standing over. The flash of Price's camera stings his eyes, and Will ducks his head, happy to stay tucked behind Jack and hold onto his IV stand.

'Hospital speculates that it was a short circuit that ignited the fire,' Jack says, and Price hums, considering, as he photographs the chamber.

'Unit looks well maintained,' he replies. 'No exposed wiring.'

Acid chokes Will's throat, and the *fear* and *pain* scarring the room makes him feel like *he* was burned… He's raw and tender, every nerve screaming agony…

'Horrible way to die,' he whispers, his eyes itching to flood gold as he looks down at the dead Omega.

'There was a kid in Italy who was in one of these things,' Price says, grimacing over his shoulder. 'A spark of static electricity from his pajamas set it off. Two cubic yards of oxygen suddenly became two cubic yards of fire.'

'Is it possible she set the fire herself?' Jack asks, and Zeller rises from his crouch, holding out a charred cuff.

'She wasn't wearing her grounding bracelet,' he says. 'Prevents the build-up of static electricity. She took it off.'

'Suicide by immolation?' Will shakes his head, and he doesn't keep the doubt from his voice. Jack shrugs at him.

'She was facing two murder charges; *both* Alphas.'

Right, because that matters more than Beta murders. Will knows what he wants to snap, but he needs to control his anger; focus on the case, instead. The facts.

'She wasn't *suicidal*, Jack. She was… sick.' He swallows. 'I was here. I spoke to her.'

Jack and Zeller both look at him, shocked.

'Why did you speak to her?' Jack asks, his voice tight with frustration.

'Because I know how she felt,' Will says quietly. *She was an Omega, she lost her Alpha… Killed her Alpha, like I killed Hobbs… She was mentally ill, like me… We were both terrified, all the time…*

'She's a *murder* suspect,' Jack growls. 'She tried to *kill* you. Your trying to be her *friend* impacts the case against her.'

'Well, the case against her doesn't *really* matter anymore, does it, Jack?' Will snaps, refusing to look at him. Refusing to look away from the dead Omega who had said she'd seen him kill Dr Sutcliffe…

I was really hoping you'd be able to remember what happened… Because I don't trust myself anymore…

***

Dreaming about being asleep is an odd sensation. Will *knows* he's asleep, but when he wakes in his dream, it *feels* real. Like he's really in his farmhouse in Wolf Trap, with the dogs in their baskets around him. A tag clinks as someone gets up, shifts and lies down again, and Buster chuffs, chasing imaginary squirrels again.

Will is curled up in his bed, in his nest, warm under layers of silk-lined blankets. Everything smells like Hannibal and him, like *home*, and, for just a moment, he's happy.

But there's another smell, now. Sweet and rotten…

Georgia…

Will opens his eyes. It's late, and the farmhouse is dark. Georgia is there, but she's not *real*. She's shaking, her outline blurring in and out of focus. Her face is swollen and bruised, her hair is almost black with grease and her eyes are a muddy amber. She looks just like she did the night they first met.

Georgia turns, as stiff and jerky as an old puppet… *Like a Japanese horror movie*, Will thinks, his chest tightening around a whimper. She's walking away, towards the front door, and he knows he needs to follow. He's already sitting up, pushing at the covers, swinging his legs out into the cold air.

He follows her outside, pulling on his coat because it's winter, and snowing, and he's shivering, even though he's not cold. He's *warm*…

Georgia waits in the front yard, watching him pause on the porch steps, and unease flickers a snake tongue across Will's crest, making it throb.

'See?' the other Omega says, staring at him, *begging* him to understand. '*See?'*

Two antlers stab through her chest, punching through her lungs and impaling her. Georgia stretches up onto her toes, arching, straining under the pressure of being lifted… Of being *mounted*…

She's burning, her breath turning to fire before she even has a chance to scream. It rages through her, eats everything up in a blast of impossible heat. Will brings his hand up to shield his eyes as ash turns to sparks, winking out into the dark night.

And then she's gone, consumed, replaced by the raven stag. It shakes razor-sharp antlers, dropping embers to the snow around it, and then lowers its head, burgundy eyes glinting. Will frowns. What is it trying to tell him?

What do you see?

Pain stabs at his forehead. Heat floods him and –

Will wakes with a start, flat on his back in the hospital bed. His t-shirt is drenched with sweat and his fingers cramp from clutching fistfuls of blankets. His nose is full of the stench of burning flesh and fire flickers behind his eyelids as he blinks, trying to clear his thoughts. Trying to remember where he really is.

'Will?'

Hannibal's soft voice calms him, and warmth spreads through his body like a drop of liquid fire. Will looks up into Hannibal's burgundy eyes, so similar to the raven stag's, but he feels

too heavy to move. He frowns when he realizes Hannibal is holding his crest, locking him in place, and tries to make a noise, to ask him what he's doing.

Why…?

'Sleep,' his Alpha whispers, giving his neck a squeeze. 'You'll trigger another heat if you're not careful.'

Another? How many have I had?

Will wants to stay awake, the ask him, but the digging thumb and the stroking finger are making him lose the thought. Exhaustion washes over him, dragging him away until he's floating in light, slipping beneath the waves. All he can see is Hannibal, smiling down at him, his sandy hair shimmering silver in the lamplight… All he smells is his Alpha, the rich, earthy musk… He's *safe*… He's warm and loved and everything's okay…

Hannibal keeps manipulating the ridges of sensitive scar tissue long after Will falls back to sleep. When his Omega's breathing is deep and even, he allows himself a moment to brush a curl back from Will's sticky forehead, but he quickly returns to the crest. He needs the Omega to listen to him, to obey. Will *mustn't* be exposed to any further stress until they can be alone together. Thanks to Alana's interference and the hospital's misguided attempts to lower his fever, his heat has been temporarily subdued, but it's only a matter time before the cycle peaks again, and there can be no stopping it next time, otherwise the excessive hormones *will* kill him.

'You need to come home,' Hannibal murmurs, slipping the words into Will's unconscious to take root and blossom as his own idea. He cradles him close, lying alongside him in the bed. 'You need to find me, Will. I have what you're looking for. I have the answers you seek.'

Drifting in the dark current of his mind, Will dips his head to the burgundy eye of his raven stag, curled between its legs. Feathers tickle his cheek as warm breath caresses his hair, and he purrs. He's happy here. Cherished…. *Coveted*.

Hannibal is watching over him. Helping him. But a shadow licks its way up his spine, and Will can't help but frown through the haze.

You have the answers… What am I looking for?

***

The buildings at Quantico are stuffy, and Will can feel the sheen of perspiration on his forehead when he walks into Jack's office the next day. He's not sure why he needs to be here, but there's just *something* eating away at his mind and he has to, he *has* to tell Jack about what he knows. What he *understands*.

It's the start of something… He's just not sure what. It's all… *So close*… So *tantalizingly* close…

Jack is wearing his reading glasses, sorting through files of paperwork strewn across his desk as he prepares to shut down the case against Georgia Madchen. He looks up and frowns when he sees Will.

‘What are *you* doing here?’

‘Checked myself out of the hospital,’ Will says, and Jack raises his eyebrows as he straightens up, papers in hand.

‘Well, check yourself back in.’

‘My fever broke,’ Will replies, and Jack shakes his head as he turns his back on him.

‘I don’t care.’

‘Georgia Madchen *didn’t* commit suicide,’ Will says, raising his voice to get the other man’s attention. ‘And whatever happened to her, *wasn’t* an accident.’

‘I’m gonna have Z come down here and stick a thermometer in you, and if you’ve got a temperature higher than 99 –’

‘She was *murdered*, Jack!’ Will can feel his eyes flash gold when he glares at the Alpha, but whether it’s from frustration or the suggestion of a *Beta* sticking *anything* in him, Will isn’t sure.

Jack turns, a growl lingering in his throat, and slaps the paper down on the desk as he rips off his glasses.

‘By who?’ he demands, frustration coloring his tone.

‘By… whoever killed Dr Sutcliffe,’ Will says, fighting to keep the tremble out of his voice and the sweat from trickling down his forehead. Jack scoffs, his hands on his hips and shoulders squared in challenge.

‘His blood was all over Georgia Madchen. Her DNA was all over him.’

Will shakes his head, drawing closer as passion squeezes his throat until it aches.

‘She *told* me there was somebody else there,’ he insists. ‘She couldn’t see his face.’

‘There *was* somebody else there,’ Jack replies. He’s getting angry now, his voice ringing out. ‘It was Dr *Sutcliffe*. She couldn’t see his face because she *cut it in half!’*

‘Jack…’ Will’s voice breaks off into a whining whimper and he ducks his head. As much as he wants to fight, his body is reacting on instinct, and he can smell the calming hormones he’s releasing.

Jack sighs, seeing the submission, and his expression softens as he moves around the desk.

‘Will, I understand. You’re looking for an explanation,’ he says, his voice still loud despite his placative gesture. ‘An explanation that makes *all* of this okay.’

‘No! No, no, no, no! That’s *not* what I want!’ Will backs up, *flinching* away from him, because he doesn’t want his touch, he *can’t* have his touch on him.

He paces back and forth as his ears fill with a whining, buzzing sound and his heart flutters in his chest. He feels weak; like his muscles are dissolving into warm water, and his trousers stick to the sweat on the backs of his thighs. At least, he *hopes* it’s sweat…

Will brings his hand up, gesturing at Jack to keep his attention.

‘Listen, something went *wrong*, and we will never know what that is…’ He falters, swallows past the swelling behind his vocal chords, and sighs. ‘But for all the doctors she saw, for all of the *help* she received, she was fighting that wrong *alone*.’

Alone and scared… I know how that feels.

‘There was *nothing* you could do about that,’ Jack says, his voice still raised.

‘*All* her adult life, this Omega was *misunderstood!’* Will’s voice is shaking now, but he can’t make it stop. Can’t stop the tears of frustration from spilling over the bright spots of color high on his cheeks… ‘And what I *can* do is make sure that her *death* isn’t misunderstood!’ He stares deep into Jack’s eyes, and he sees the Alpha’s shoulders move when Jack sighs… When he *considers* Will’s words.

Will shakes his head.

‘She *didn’t* kill herself.’ He brushes the wetness from his face. ‘And this *wasn’t* an accident.’

***

Jack’s agreement to look into Georgia’s death in more detail means that Will has to go down to the morgue, and he can feel his skin peeling back from raw nerves with every step further into the room. The *violence* down here, the *pain* of each death… He wants to vomit. It’s not usually this bad, is it?

Jack and Zeller’s words are muffled, distorted through the waves of heat pressing in on his eardrums, and Will fights to keep from rubbing his eyes. His vision is hazy; fire still flickers when he closes his eyes, making red and gold sparks dance in front of him. His fever may have broken but he’s still hot; he’s wearing too many layers and sweat glistens on his forehead, trickling down the back of his neck and making his crest itch.

He can hear his heartbeat… Dim and steady… *Thud-thud… Thud-thud*... He’s coiled like a spring; pulled back and waiting for something. Pacing back and forth because he feels trapped, trapped and with this desperate urge to *move*, to *do* something.

Soon…

‘So, we dismantled the oxygen chamber,’ Zeller says, his voice picking up as the fog clears. ‘See if anyone tampered with the wiring…’ He pulls out Georgia’s body as he speaks, and they draw closer to the body. ‘Or even like a short circuit, but nothing.’

‘So, what sparked the fire?’ Jack asks, looking confused.

‘Inconclusive,’ Zeller replies, shrugging. ‘But –’

‘Not *conclusively* inconclusive,’ Price interrupts, almost *hopping* with excitement, and Zeller gestures to him as Jimmy wiggles a little sample pot at Jack. ‘Found this,’ the forensics examiner continues, watching as Jack holds it up to frown at the little piece of black inside. ‘Thought it might have been part of the bed, or monitoring equipment, but mass spectrometer said it was celluloid plastic. They don’t *use* plastic in those things.’

‘Right, right; it generates er, static electricity,’ Will says, frowning as the *gravity* of this tries to cut through the sludge of his brain. Tries to sharpen it into *knowledge*. Answers.

‘Her hair is melted right in there,’ Zeller says. ‘Preserved like it was an amber.’

His shadow nuzzles at his cheek. Warm breath ruffles his hair and he feels velvet on his skin… Remembers the way Georgia touched her hair… *Such pretty hair… Beth always spent hours brushing it…*

‘Could it have been a plastic comb?’ he asks quietly, and both Price and Zeller look thoughtful.

‘Static charge from a plastic comb in a highly oxygenated environment *would* be a powerful accelerant,’ Jimmy says, looking from Will to Jack.

‘Anything combustible in there would… combust,’ Zeller agrees, and Will gestures frantically at the plastic in the little pot.

I understand.

‘You’re *holding* the murder weapon,’ he says, but Jack raises an eyebrow at him, unimpressed.

‘*Or* whatever she used to kill herself,’ he replies, reminder him of the current assumption.

Will growls and spins around, grabbing the handle of the drawer marked *Sutcliffe, D*. Yanks out the tray with the dead Omega Specialist on it, and Jack has to hold up a hand to stem Zeller and Price’s protests.

‘Will!’

‘Whoa! Whoa, whoa!’

‘Whoever killed Sutcliffe wanted to kill him how Georgia Madchen killed her victim but, but not *exactly* how, correct?’ Will’s voice is tight; the pressure from his swollen glands

constricting his voice until it rasps and wavers, and he can *feel* the sweat on his forehead. He looks to Price and Zeller for help, and both forensics experts nod.

'Georgia Madchen carved up her victim's face,' Zeller agrees. 'Sutcliffe was nearly decapitated at the *jaw*, I mean…' He shrugs.

'So, she went *further* the second time,' Jack says pointedly. 'Serial killers often do that.'

'She was *copied*,' Will snarls, scrabbling for something, *anything* to make Jack understand. 'Like, er, whoever killed Marissa Schurr and Cassie Boyle wanted to *copy* how Garrett Jacob Hobbs killed his victims.' And then it clicks, and he freezes because it's *true*, it's all true and he knows it, he *knows*, he *understands*… 'But not exactly how…'

'Wait a minute.' Jack holds his hands up, visibly struggling to keep up with the leaps Will's mind has just made. 'Are you saying that Dr Sutcliffe was killed by Garrett Jacob Hobbs's *copycat*?'

Price and Zeller both look at Will; comically in sync if not for the grotesqueness of the truth.

Will nods, squinting because it can't be true, but it *is*… It's *all* true… *My design*...

'And so was Georgia Madchen,' he whispers, fear twisting his gut into knots, smothering him until he has to take a step back. To recoil. 'Because he thinks she saw his face…'

I dreamed you killed that doctor...

'You said Nicholas Boyle was the copycat,' Jack says, frowning at the way Will has started to back away, blue eyes wide and searching, sightless to the room around him. He tries to ground him again. Tries to bring him back. 'His blood was on one of the victims. Nicholas Boyle is dead.'

Will shakes his head, hot tears burning his eyes. He can't *breathe*… Like the air just got that little bit thicker, the oxygen a bit weaker… Because he knows the truth now… And it's terrifying.

'Well, then he *isn't* the copycat.'

And if he isn't… Who is?

***

The quiet flutter of unease at Jack Crawford's impromptu appearance at his office that evening stirs into something deeper as the FBI Agent describes Will's behavior and the claims he has made since checking himself out of hospital this morning.

'Could this be more than just a fever?' Jack asks, half to himself, half to Hannibal, sitting across the desk from him. 'Will is connecting murders that previously had no connections.'

Looking for answers, Hannibal thinks, torn between applauding his mate's ability to understand the kills and frustrated at the way Will interpreted his suggestion. *You were*

supposed to look for me, your Alpha, not the Copycat Killer. *Stubborn, clever boy*.

He is careful, however, to keep his face neutral and shields his thoughts behind dark eyes.

'Beyond his involvement in the investigations?'

Jack nods.

'That's right.'

Hannibal hums, pretending to consider this. Pretending not to feel the thrill of fear at the idea of Will closing in on him. Hunting him, and he hunting Will in return. *A true Alpha-Omega chase.*

'So, you're wondering if the lines are blurring or if he's onto something.'

'I'm wondering all *sorts* of things,' Jack says, glancing up at him and then frowning into space.

Hannibal allows the silence to breathe for a moment, calculating the odds of Will discovering the truth before Hannibal is confident in his loyalty… Considering the options available to them both, to use this turn of events to strengthen Will's darkness…

'What's Will's relationship with Abigail Hobbs right now?' Jack asks, his voice cutting into Hannibal's thoughts.

Hannibal buys himself a moment, clearing his throat and adjusting the pen on his notebook. *This is good; Jack is already suspicious of Abigail, and there is already a crack in his faith in Will… Let's widen that, shall we? Let him do the work.*

He sits back in his chair and looks down at his lap.

'You think he's protecting her?'

As expected, Jack's eyes flash red and a low growl catches in his throat.

'He *has* been ever since he shot her father,' he replies. 'I just don't know from *what*.'

Perhaps the truth that she killed Nicholas Boyle? Hannibal wants to laugh at the thought.

'I can't imagine that he would hide anything criminal from you. I've only ever known Will as a man striving to be his best self.'

Of course, what that means might be different to us… And Will is still so torn.

Jack frowns, gaze still distant.

'You haven't known him that long.' The Alpha sighs and looks at Hannibal. 'But we *both* know him well enough to know he hasn't been himself.'

He's been more himself than ever before. Hannibal can feel his eyes prickling, desperate to flare red in defense of his mate. Jack has no *idea* who Will really is. He sees the mask, but not the swarming darkness behind it. The power.

You do not deserve him. *His true potential sickens you*.

'He needs our support,' he says simply, shaking his head to chase away thoughts of savagery, and adopts a faintly concerned expression as he puts the last piece into play. 'Whether or not mental illness is involved.'

Jack's breath catches in his throat and he shakes his head.

'Mental illness…' he whispers. 'Is it really mental illness, Doctor, or is it just that his mind works so differently from most people's that we don't know what else to call it?'

Hannibal allows another silence, but this time he is genuinely contemplating Jack's words. Will's mind is a labyrinth of dark fury, crushing despair and pure, innocent love. He is everything Hannibal is not, and yet they are two sides of the same coin. Will is warm where he is cold. Impulsive where he is calculating. But their shadow… the bloodlust and the endless *need* for more, for something deeper, richer, darkness… *That* is what links them, more so than their Alpha-Omega bond ever could.

When he replies, Hannibal's voice holds a quiet sense of awe. He is lost in appreciation of his mate's capacity for both violence and tenderness, and he misses the sharp look of suspicion that Jack gives him as he says softly,

'There are days when even Will doesn't understand his own thinking.'

***

Will is waiting on the porch to greet him when Hannibal arrives at the Wolf Trap farmhouse that evening. Hannibal sets his bag of food down in favor of scooping his Omega into his arms, and he tastes whiskey on Will's breath when they kiss.

'Drinking already?' he asks, tilting his head at him in concern. 'How do you feel?'

'I know, I know; I should have told you I was checking myself out of the hospital,' Will mumbles, ducking his head to snuggle closer to Hannibal's chest. 'I didn't want to worry you.'

'You're avoiding my question, Will.' Hannibal strokes the back of Will's hair, tangling his fingers in his curls and using his grip to pull his mate's head back so that he can feel his forehead with his other hand and check his temperature. 'Hm… Still warm… Do you have cramps?'

'I'm fine,' Will replies, ignoring the tightening in his belly, spreading down to the muscles at his pelvis until slick wets his ass cheeks. Tilting his head even further back, Will bares his throat and smiles, stepping closer and rubbing his semi-hardness against Hannibal's hip. 'What's for dinner, Doctor Lecter?'

Hannibal chuckles, his eyes flashing red at his mate's suggestive tone and the feel of his body. Arousal tightens his groin and he feels himself twitch in response. Lowering his mouth to Will's offering, he parts his lips and gently kisses the thudding artery beneath Will's ear, nibbling at the skin and then sucking hard as he wraps both arms around Will's body and hauls him close.

Will moans at Hannibal's dominant hold on him, at the feel of teeth denting his flesh, and he arches up, spreading his thighs around his Alpha's knee and rocking against the pressure. Hannibal allows him to slide his fingers through his sandy hair, and Will uses his grip on the other man's head to keep his mouth at his throat, urging him to bite and suck harder. To mark him. Claim him, over and over. Fire flashes through his body, racing up his spine to settle like an iron on his crest. The ridges swell and throb, desperate to be touched, to be licked, squeezed, torn. Anything. As long as it's his Alpha doing it. Will can feel heat swamping him, drowning him, and he's fast losing himself to the dark current bubbling up inside him.

'Easy, Will.' Hannibal smells the change in his mate's scent, smells the sweet Omega musk thicken to a smoky syrup. His mouth waters and he purrs, long and low, nuzzling at the dribble of blood on Will's throat. 'You don't want to go back into heat, do you?' he murmurs, pulling back enough to look into his Omega's eyes. Gold battles blue, and Will's pupils widen, fighting to spill out as he tumbles into prodrome. But it's not time, yet; Hannibal needs to discuss Jack's concerns with him. So, despite it feeling as if he's tearing a wound in himself, he steps back, putting a few steps between them.

The distance, Hannibal's *retreat*, feels like a bucket of ice water over his head, and Will shudders, hugging himself. He swallows the whimper fighting to escape his mouth, pressing his lips tight together and blinking to clear the haze in front of his eyes. He's feverish again, and his heart is racing, a fast, dull thud behind his ribcage. *Don't want to go back into heat…* Hannibal's words catch, making him frown.

'Why *did* I go into heat?' he mumbles, absently reaching down to pet Rudy and Winston as the two dogs come to check on him. He can't bring himself to look at his Alpha; he's not sure he can control himself if he does. Hannibal already smells good… *Really* good; a rich, warm musk, hinting at meat and blood and smoky darkness… He swallows again, licking his lips. 'That night I shot Gideon… I was still on suppressants.'

Hannibal considers him, narrowing his eyes at the top of Will's unruly curls. They are getting closer to the truth, but it's not quite time for the full story yet.

'Many things can trigger a heat in an Omega,' he replies, bending to retrieve his leather bag from the porch chair. 'Most notably stress, and excitement.'

'Excitement…' Will huffs, looking out at the snowy yard lit by the bulb hanging in the tree. His eyes linger on the spot where, in his dream, the raven stag speared Georgia, right before she burst into flames…

'Will?' Hannibal's touch on his shoulder makes him flinch, and Will forces himself to turn his back on the outside. He manages a smile, and then follows Hannibal into the house, counting off the dogs before locking the door. Realizes he was stood outside in the bitter air

without a coat when his Alpha shrugs out of *his* overcoat and hangs it next to Will's waxed jacket on the coat stand.

'Are you going to tell me to check myself back into the hospital, too?' he grumbles, watching the way Hannibal's eyes travel over his pink cheeks and bright eyes. Truthfully, he's not sure *why* he didn't stay – the doctors don't know what caused the heat, after all, or the seizure it incited, but there was just this *feeling* that he needed to be out, needed to be home, to find the answers…

'I would never presume to tell you what to do,' Hannibal replies, removing his suit jacket and unbuttoning his shirt cuffs to roll up the sleeves. 'I would only ever suggest what I thought was good for you.'

Will hums, narrowing his eyes in suspicion, but he can't help the little snort of laughter when he shakes his head. It's true – Hannibal *doesn't* tell him what to do. He isn't like the other Alphas Will has encountered; he doesn't feel the need to control everything, or dominate through overbearing orders.

You let me be myself.

'So.' He clears his throat. 'Flirting aside, what *is* for dinner?' he asks, wiping sweaty palms on his thighs and traipsing after his Alpha into the kitchen. He can feel the heat in his crest retreating, settling like glowing coals deep inside him. Leans back in the doorway, crossing his arms as Hannibal removes a variety of Tupperware dishes and sets them on the counter.

'A simple dish for your first night home,' Hannibal replies, moving to the sink to wash his hands. 'Beef cheek and red wine ragù, with fresh pasta.'

'As *simple* as your chicken soup, I'm sure,' Will teases, allowing him to wander closer now that his body has calmed. He loops his arms around Hannibal's waist, hugging up against a broad back, and rests both palms flat against his Alpha's flat stomach. 'Nothing's *ever* what it seems with you, is it?' He feels his mate tense, and leans up to brush his lips across the back of the other man's neck as he whispers, 'Don't worry; it's one of my favorite things about you.'

'The feeling is mutual,' Hannibal murmurs, turning in the embrace and holding each side of Will's face. He stares down into gold-ringed eyes, enjoying the open, trusting expression on his mate's face. 'You are an enigma, Will.'

Will's chest tightens, and he smiles. He likes this feeling; warm affection, hinting at something deeper. Something they can only say with gestures, for now.

'I could hear you,' he says softly, reaching up to stroke Hannibal's cheek. 'Outside Alana's house… Asking me to stay with you…'

'I was worried,' Hannibal confesses, mirroring Will's gesture and stroking his beard with his thumb. 'I forgot, for a moment, how incredibly *strong* you are.'

'Stubborn,' Will scoffs. 'I'm *stubborn*.'

‘As am I,’ Hannibal replies, pulling Will closer and brushing his lips across his. ‘And ruthless. When I want something, I get it.’

‘I’m aware of that,’ Will breathes, speaking into Hannibal’s mouth as they tease each other with barely-there kisses. ‘You wanted *me*. You got me.’

‘I fought for you,’ Hannibal purrs, lowering his hands to massage Will’s chest through the soft cotton of his t-shirt. ‘I killed for you.’

‘Big, strong Alpha,’ Will teases, unbuttoning Hannibal’s waistcoat and slipping his hands inside to rub the muscles hidden beneath his shirt. ‘You claimed me.’

‘I did.’ Hannibal nuzzles Will’s jaw, encouraging his Omega to tilt his head back in surrender as he dips his hands beneath the hem of Will’s t-shirt and begins to lift it up. ‘You’re *mine*.’

‘And you’re mine,’ Will says, unbuttoning Hannibal’s shirt to expose the skin beneath. He groans. ‘God… I *missed* you.’

‘I’m here.’ Hannibal pulls Will’s t-shirt up and over his head, dropping it onto the floor at their feet before capturing his mouth in a tender kiss. Will purrs, shivering at the tingles spreading through him, but Hannibal is gentle, and the heat holds steady, a bubbling, tantalizing hint of prodrome without tipping over.

‘*Hannibal*.’

‘Let me make love to you,’ Hannibal whispers, gathering Will up into his arms and hugging him close, kissing him and stroking his hair, his back, his hips. Worshipping him. ‘I won’t let it overwhelm you.’

‘I don’t want to go into heat,’ Will says, his eyes already slipping shut at the feel of strong fingers slipping beneath the waistband of his jeans. He whines, squirming as slick wets his boxers and his balls jump up against his body. ‘Mmm… Promise me?’

‘I promise.’ Hannibal pulls him around and turns them both, pushing Will up against the counter before capturing his mouth in another kiss. He licks the inner rim of his lips until they part and then coaxes Will’s tongue out so that he can stroke up the underside of it before sucking it down. Swallows Will’s moan, holding him steady with both hands on his hips as the Omega tries to buck up against him.

‘Hannibal…’ Will’s voice cracks and he breaks off into a whine, scrabbling to undo his jeans because his Alpha is taking too long, and he needs it now, *now*, now… Sweat beads between the pectoral muscles of his chest, dribbling down to catch in the line of dark hair leading from his navel, and Hannibal hushes him, capturing his hands and bringing them up to kiss each fingertip, slowing it down again.

‘Come to the bed with me,’ Hannibal murmurs, leading the stumbling Omega towards the semi-made bed in the main room of the house. He eases Will to sit on the edge of the mattress and crouches before him, placing Will’s burning hands on his shoulders to squeeze and stroke

the muscles there, to push at the fabric of his waistcoat and unbutton his shirt as he pulls off Will's boots and socks.

'You smell so good,' Will gasps, falling forwards to nuzzle against Hannibal's cheek, pressing burning kisses to his chin and forehead, dragging his scent deep into his lungs. Filling himself with it. 'Please… I want you in me, now… I need you…'

'I'm here,' Hannibal says, undoing his tie and shrugging out of his clothes. He toes off his shoes as he rises, hands already on the button of his suit trousers, and Will fights to get his own jeans and boxers off. '*Slowly*, Will. Focus on your surroundings.'

'I'm focused,' Will purrs, blue-gold eyes locked onto his Alpha's flesh, on the hardness revealed beneath a toned abdomen and broad chest. He lies back, arching his spine and raising his arms over his head, his wrists crossed in surrender. Rolls his head back to bare his throat, and tucks his knees up to present himself for the Alpha. 'Are *you* focused?'

'Captivated,' Hannibal breathes. He crawls on top of the smaller man, lying hard and heavy between creamy thighs, their flesh meeting and sliding over each other as coarse hair joins and they press their lengths together. Will moans at the feel of it, at the dribble of pre-cum on his flesh, not knowing if it's his or Hannibal's. He *aches* with the emptiness inside him, with his muscles clenching around *nothing*, and then, at the feel of Hannibal's hardness nudging the crease between his buttocks, he relaxes, spilling hot slick onto his Alpha.

'How does it feel?' he asks, his voice wobbling, watching the way Hannibal shivers, his dark eyes flickering crimson. 'When it touches you… How does it feel?'

'Like *power*,' Hannibal replies. 'Like life itself.'

He braces himself on his left arm, looking down into Will's face, at the flushed cheeks and swollen lips, and snakes his right hand between them. Dips beneath his Omega's throbbing hardness and cups his damp balls, rolling and squeezing the sensitive sack as Will rolls his hips, silently begging for more. Hannibal presses two fingertips against the twitching, glistening ring of muscle, rubbing circles as Will bites his lip and lifts up, spreading his legs wider to make it easier for Hannibal to enter him. He brings his arms down from above his head and wraps one around Hannibal's neck, stroking up and down his Alpha's chest with the other, hugging him close.

'Please,' Will whispers, leaning up to kiss him again. 'Please fuck me?'

'Such a crude boy,' Hannibal says, positioning his fingers so that Will's slick runs down into his palm as he teases him, *just* breaching the entry to his body without giving him the satisfaction of feeling him inside. 'Say it again.'

'Please, Hannibal.' Will grins at him, his eyes flickering gold and then settling back to blue. He cups the side of his Alpha's face, gazing up at him with his chest heaving, *showing* him how aroused he is. '*Please* fuck me?' He grazes his teeth along Hannibal's jaw, reaching down as far as he can and digging his fingers into Hannibal's flank, hauling him fully on top of his body. 'Please, Alpha.'

‘Slowly,’ Hannibal warns, nudging Will’s face to the side so that he can press his lips to his Omega’s thundering artery. ‘Push out for me.’

Will nods, bracing himself as Hannibal guides himself past the tight entrance to sink, inch by inch, inside his body. It’s tight, so very tight, and he winces at the cramping, aching stretch, breathing through his nose as he waits for the sting to go. The pressure makes his heart flutter and he gasps a laugh when Hannibal purrs against his chin.

‘You feel good, Will.’ Hannibal speaks quietly, his voice rough, and Will hums his agreement.

‘I’ll feel even better once you start moving,’ he jokes. Hannibal nods against him, kissing his neck again, and then rolls his pelvis. Skin drags on skin as he pulls halfway out, and Will can’t stop the whimper bubbling up from his throat at the feel of his Alpha leaving his body. But then Hannibal pushes back inside, and he’s so *full*, so *connected*. It brushes *that* spot inside him and Will shudders, long and low, pushing a groan up after the second whimper when Hannibal does it again, and again, drawing pleasure from a well very deep within, faint at first but growing fast, into something so much *stronger*.

‘*Ohh*... Oh, *fuck*...’ He’s forgotten to keep stroking Hannibal’s muscles, forgotten to do anything but cling to him as Hannibal fucks him, slow and deep, *owning* him. Making love to him…

‘Close your eyes, Will.’ Hannibal hooks his elbows under his Omega’s knees, lifting him higher, and sinks even deeper into him. Will obeys, squeezing his eyes tight shut as he rides the waves of pleasure Hannibal is wringing from his body. It’s *so* light, so *clean*… Nothing desperate or carnal, nothing aggressive about it, just an endless sense of peace coiling tighter and tighter.

And then Hannibal adjusts the rhythm, and the pleasure climbs higher again. Will’s lips part and he forgets to close them. Forgets to care as tears leak from the corners of his eyes at how *painfully* sweet it is. How *right*.

‘Hannibal…!’

‘That’s it, Will…’ Hannibal counts his breath, ignoring the climax rising within himself, and he moves a little faster, a little harder, building the friction, building the pleasure. Seeing Will like this, seeing him give himself to the sensation without being in heat… He swallows, an odd sensation making his heartbeat falter. ‘Now, Will. Look at me… Look at me.’

Will opens his eyes, staring up at his Alpha, at his *everything*. The smell of Hannibal blends with the thick, sweet musk of their joined bodies, a perfect scent to accompany the sight of sandy hair over Hannibal’s forehead, silver chest hair and rippling muscles, and Will can feel his orgasm start to overwhelm him. It’s a rising tide; a steady and uncontrollable flood of pleasure that makes him keen, makes his eyes roll back and his body spasm around his Alpha’s swelling knot and it’s so, *so* good, so white and tender and *raw*.

Hannibal grabs either side of Will’s face, drinking in the sight of his climax ripping through him. The expression of bliss, the near-pained baring of his teeth and the way Will judders,

again and again and again, before collapsing under Hannibal's weight… it's *beautiful*. The Alpha can feel himself shuddering, his hips thrusting two, three more times before every muscle locks rigid and he spills his seed as deep inside his mate as he can. His knot swells, sealing them together, and he releases Will's knees so that his Omega can lower his legs back onto the bed.

'Will…' He pants into Will's lips, trying to kiss him and breathe simultaneously, and Will manages to pet at his arms, hugging him close as they ride the aftershocks.

'God… Hannibal…' Will presses his burning cheek to Hannibal's warm face, content to just breathe in the smell of him, and fists his hand in Hannibal's hair to hold him close. 'Mm… Thank you… Thank you.'

'The pleasure was mine,' Hannibal purrs, stroking Will's curls. 'Would you like dinner in bed?'

'Mmm…' Will kisses Hannibal again, nodding into the embrace. 'And then you can fuck me again.'

'We have to be careful.' Hannibal nibbles the tender flesh beneath Will's ear, lacing their fingers together and pinning Will's hands to either side of his head. 'You mustn't get too excited.'

'Fine, fine.' Will rolls his eyes, but he doesn't stop smiling as he massages Hannibal's arms. 'We'll have a very boring, very *careful* fuck.'

Hannibal chuckles, and looks down at him, tilting his head as he smiles.

'Whatever will you do if we're apart for more than a week?' he muses, tracing the curve of Will's cheekbone with his thumb. The Omega growls and moves fast, capturing the skin between his teeth for a sharp nip and then a purring lick.

'I think I'd go insane,' he breathes, bending his knees and locking his ankles together around Hannibal's slim hips. The movement pulls at the swollen knot and both men groan, but they don't push it further. Will's skin is still shining with sweat, and Hannibal knows another climax now would tip him over the edge. Instead, he decides to calm them both down by steering the conversation away from further flirtations.

'Jack Crawford came to see me today,' he murmurs, and Will stills beneath him, the mirth fading from his eyes. 'He expressed concern about your mental state.'

'I'm onto something,' Will says, his eyes lighting up. 'I know I am. Georgia Madchen *didn't* commit suicide.'

Hannibal ignores him; ignores the disquiet spreading through his gut.

'He asked me about your relationship with Abigail.'

Will's eyes widen and he stares up at his Alpha. Remembers his moment of clarity, his realization that Abigail had killed Nick Boyle… When Hannibal had confessed to helping her

dispose of the body…

‘What did you tell him?’ he asks, his voice quivering. Hannibal cups his cheek and kisses him, once, before replying,

‘Nothing.’

‘Why? Jack must suspect something…’ He looks sick. ‘Does he suspect Abigail?’

Hannibal frowns, considering the question. He waits for a moment, choosing his words carefully, before he says,

‘I don’t think Jack knows *what* he suspects just yet.’ *Or who*.

Will growls under his breath, clenching his fists into the covers. He feels his crest pulse and forces himself to relax, releasing his breath in a long sigh.

‘Thank you for not telling him about me,’ he mutters, his gaze distant as he stares off across the room. ‘About us.’

‘Of course,’ Hannibal replies. He shifts as his knot starts to go down, and slips free of Will’s body with a wince from both men. ‘As far as Jack is concerned, I am simply your psychiatrist.’

‘Not even my friend?’ Will asks quietly, a hint of sadness in his voice. Hannibal sits up, pausing when Will reaches to twine their fingers together and says, ‘You could tell him you’re my friend.’

‘I hope to tell him the truth eventually,’ Hannibal replies, giving his hand a quick squeeze before he stands, returning to the kitchen to prepare the food. ‘In time, I hope to tell everyone the truth.’

About us… About your darkness… Everything.

***

Frustrated by his discussion with Hannibal’s psychiatrist, Dr Du Maurier, Jack Crawford decides to return to the basics. Forensics and good police work. Which is why, at eight o’clock the next morning, he is standing in the lab with Price and Zeller, staring down at the near-severed head of Dr Sutcliffe.

‘Will Graham theorized that the Copycat Killer and Garrett Jacob Hobbs were somehow connected. That he had *insight* into Hobbs’s personal life, that they may have met, known each other, perhaps even killed together.’

He turns as he speaks, looking down at the two Betas waiting beside the burned body of Georgia Madchen. And Zeller, being Zeller, challenges that.

‘See, I would call that less of a theory, more of a hypothesis,’ he replies, and Price looks at him, humming his agreement.

'*Yes*; theories require *evidence*.' He raises his eyebrows at Jack, barely suppressing a grin when the Alpha's eyes flicker red.

'Hm. Let's play Jeopardy, shall we?' Jack says. 'The answer is that these people were killed by the Copycat, who's connected to Garrett Jacob Hobbs. You tell me *how*.'

Zeller snorts.

'You mean, *beyond* the application of supposition and unexplained leaps?'

Jack's nostrils flare at the sarcasm.

'*Yes*,' he growls. 'That's right.'

'Ah! I've been *yearning* for a return to the fundamentals of investigation!' Price teases, and Zeller turns to him, nodding enthusiastically.

'*Right*?'

Jack bows his head, rolling his eyes at their antics.

'*Where* is Beverly?' he mutters, and Price looks solemn.

'Jury duty.'

Zeller nudges him, coughing as he quickly corrects that to,

'It's… She's deposed in court.'

'Get her *out* of court,' Jack snaps. 'Then here's what we're gonna do.' He holds up a finger, directing them to follow him as he leads the way out into the corridor. 'I wanna look at train station, airport, roll road, hotel details… I wanna track Garrett Jacob Hobbs using license plate capture from security footage. I also wanna know every phone call he made, *and* where he made them from.'

'I'll see if I can get R&I to lend us a couple of clerks to help us cross-match,' Price says, and Jack nods.

'Good. I also wanna know every place that he went that wasn't home. I wanna know long he was there, I wanna know *who* he was there with… *and* I wanna know the travel time to the nearest missing girl in the Minnesota Shrike case, you got it?'

'Got it,' Zeller says, and Price nods, before they turn on their heels and hurry off to do as bid.

Jack stares after them, chewing on his lip. There's something about all of this that doesn't feel right; he's just not sure what.

What aren't you telling me, Will?

***

After his conversation with Hannibal last night, Will takes the afternoon off work to check on Abigail. He doesn't like that Jack is still suspicious of her, especially now that he knows there's something to hide, so he leaves Quantico after lunch to drive out to the Porthaven Psychiatric Hospital, arriving just after three.

Abigail is subdued, following quietly when Will suggests they sit in the recreation room near the windows, tucked away out of earshot from the Omega nurses and other patients.

'How are you?' Will asks, keeping his voice low and pitching it to be soothing as he looks at her haunted eyes and pale, pinched cheeks.

Abigail dips her head, spilling auburn hair over her shoulder. She's lost weight, and her clothes hang from her slim frame. She still wears a scarf around her throat, hiding the scar, and, when she speaks, her blue eyes wobble with tears.

'You told me that killing someone was the ugliest thing in the world,' she says shakily, chewing on her thumbnail as she speaks to the floor.

Will can *feel* her pain like razors on his skin, cutting him so deep it makes his *throat* hurt.

'One of them,' he rasps.

'I finally get it,' Abigail says, wiping her nose. 'I thought there was something wrong with me, because I didn't feel ugly when I killed Nick Boyle.' She looks at him, taking strength from his steady, loving gaze, and smiles bitterly. 'I felt *good*.'

Will swallows, but he doesn't say anything, and Abigail glances away, her cheeks pinkening.

'That's why it was so easy to lie about it,' she mutters.

Will looks away with her, his shadow coiling through his ribs, licking across his heart and up into his skull.

'Like you didn't do anything wrong?' he says grimly, and Abigail considers him, resting her chin on her clasped hands.

'Feel like you'd done something wrong when you killed my dad?' she asks, searching his blue eyes for a connection. For understanding.

My Alpha… When I killed my Alpha… Will feels needles digging into his crest, and he squeezes his hands together to keep from reaching for it.

'I felt terrified,' he whispers, and Abigail's eyes widen. But the fear is fleeting; darkness oozes through his veins and Will can *hear* the purr in his voice as he continues, 'And then… I felt *powerful*.'

And Abigail nods, because she understands. Her shadow is weaker than his, smaller, but *there* nonetheless, blending and twisting with his in the space between them.

‘It felt good,’ she breathes, drawing Will in until he can’t help but nod. ‘To get to *end* it. To *stop* it all.’ She clenches her jaw, anger making her nose whiten. ‘I thought I got *away* from him.’

‘No, no…’ Will speaks quietly, refusing to acknowledge the hint of longing in his voice. ‘I don’t think *either* of us have gotten away from your father.’

Tears splash down Abigail’s cheeks when she shakes her head.

‘I wish I’d *killed* him,’ she growls. ‘For killing my mom. For killing all those girls, for making *me* –’ She cuts off, panic souring her scent for just a moment, and Will tilts his head, frowning.

‘Making you *what*, Abigail?’

Abigail looks away again, pursing her lips together. Hannibal knows, but the Alpha told her that *he* would be the one to tell Will. To make him understand.

‘*Part* of it,’ she recovers, staring at Will again. ‘Part of *any* of it.’ She nods towards the other patients. ‘This wasn’t supposed to be my life…’ She takes a breath, blinking away moisture. ‘… Feels like my dad’s still out there,’ she admits, and Will hums his agreement.

‘In a way, he is,’ he says, staring deep into her face, *willing* her to understand him. What he knows, what he needs from her. And Abigail is clever, *so* clever.

‘You mean the Copycat?’ she whispers.

Now. Help me, Abigail. Help me like I helped you.

Will dips his head a fraction, drawing her in as he pushes heat through his body until his eyes flash gold, signaling how *strong* his emotions are. He hasn’t refreshed his Beta pheromone spray; his Omega musk will draw her in, inviting her to trust him. Make her *want* to help him. A lowly trick, something only an Omega could, and *would* do, but he’s desperate.

‘I think I can catch him,’ he says quietly. Then, to strengthen the manipulation, he reaches out and enfolds both of her bare hands in his own, pushing his scent onto her, making sure to turn his wrists in a submissive gesture. ‘But I’m gonna need your help.’

And Abigail looks at him, her breath catching as she stares at her surrogate father, at the Omega who saved her life… She looks at his clenched jaw, his big, doe eyes, and she nods.

***

Will drives straight home after visiting Abigail. Lets the dogs out into the yard and pours himself a double whiskey to drink as he sits on the porch, watching the moths flutter around the lamp in the tree.

He should call Hannibal. Tell him… what? That he misses him? But that he wants to sleep alone tonight? That he’ll probably stay up, thinking, until it’s time to go to work again, because he needs to understand *how* it’s all connected. And what he’s going to do about it.

He has a plan. He thinks he does, he's just not sure how *sensible* it is. And he *wants* to talk to Hannibal about it, but not now. Not when dusk is creeping in and he's had a drink, making him dizzy and drowsy. Not when the *idea* of speaking to his Alpha makes him squirm and *ache* with longing…

If he calls Hannibal, he'll ask to see him, and if he sees him, he'll fuck him, and it won't be gentle. It won't be *making love*. It'll be hard and fast and brutal, and it will trigger a heat. He can tell from the sharp, spicy smoke to his musk, from the *ache* inside him, where his Alpha's knot should be, filling him with seed until something catches… Until there's more than just two fingers of whiskey in his belly…

He *can't*. He can't right now.

Right now? Right now as in not this month, or not this year?

Before he can examine his thoughts further, a loud buzzing cuts through the quiet, accompanied by a tell-tale vibration against his leg. It's his cell, and Will knocks back the last of the whiskey before pulling it from his jeans pocket. Huffs a laugh when he sees the caller ID, and rolls his eyes as he holds the phone to his ear.

'Hello, Hannibal.'

'Hello, Will.'

He feels his shoulders grind as the tension drains away at the sound of his Alpha's voice, and Will leans back in the chair, resting his head against the windowsill behind him.

'I was thinking about calling you,' he says softly, closing his eyes so that he can savor the *sound* of his mate's deep, soothing tone. So that he can imagine sandy hair, sharp cheekbones and dark eyes, glinting burgundy in the light from the farmhouse windows…

Propping his phone between shoulder and ear, Hannibal scoops up finely chopped onion and peppers and adds them to the broth simmering on the hob. He can't sense much from Will; his mate's mind is buzzing, and too focused to allow for an intrusion. The sensation of being locked out is… unsettling.

'How do you feel?' he asks, wiping his hands off on his apron. 'Jack told me you'd taken the afternoon off.'

'I went to see Abigail,' Will replies, pinching the bridge of his nose against the headache threatening to creep up from the base of his skull. 'I was hoping she could help me with something.'

'Help you with what?' Hannibal asks, pausing midway through stirring. He hears Will sigh, and he can imagine the Omega shaking his head as he chooses the right words.

Will sits forwards, his elbows on his knees. He opens his eyes, watching Buster snuffling around his feet, and then reaches down to fuss the little dog.

'I'm not sure yet,' he says softly. 'I'm still working it out in my own mind.'

‘Would you like to spend the night alone?’ Hannibal asks, and Will feels his lips tug up into a tired smile at his mate’s innate ability to *understand* and predict his needs.

‘As much as I’ll miss you… I think it would be for the best,’ he replies. ‘If I see you…’ He huffs again. ‘My body feels *tight*, like a trigger.’

‘The proverbial roller coaster,’ Hannibal murmurs, repeating Will’s words back to him. ‘Pulling up before the plunge.’

‘The plunge, in this case, being a heat,’ Will says. ‘Perhaps I should question your prescribing abilities, Doctor.’

Hannibal chuckles, a dark, rich sound at how impossibly *accurate* that statement is.

‘Or, perhaps this is simply a case of biology winning,’ he suggests. ‘We can’t fight our nature forever.’

‘Yeah, well, I wanna fight for as long as possible,’ Will mutters, rubbing tired eyes. ‘I don’t have *time* for a heat.’

‘How terribly inconvenient it is,’ Hannibal teases, moving to the fridge and collecting the tray of sausages he’d made earlier in the week. ‘To be overwhelmed by your emotions. *Desperate* for your Alpha.’

‘A drooling, useless *mess* of hormones,’ Will corrects. ‘Unable to *think* about anything but breeding.’

‘And you want to think,’ Hannibal says, earning a hum of agreement from his mate.

‘I need to,’ Will says, gazing out, unseeing, at the darkness rolling in across the fields. ‘I’m close to something… I know it.’

Hannibal lowers his head, chewing the inside of his cheek to keep from saying something he might regret. Will’s heat may be imminent, but until the prodrome returns, the only barriers between his Omega and the truth are the crushing headaches caused by the detox, and his trust in his Alpha…

‘Will…’

‘I know,’ Will murmurs. ‘I need to be careful. I am. I’m going to go inside, and relax… And take some aspirin for this headache…’

‘If it gets too bad, call me,’ Hannibal says, allowing some of his concern to strain his voice. ‘I don’t like you being alone right now.’

‘I appreciate the space,’ Will replies, and he chuckles when he hears the Alpha’s quiet groan at his avoidance. ‘I know, I know; emotional manipulation, right? An Omega’s best weapon.’

‘I believe your best weapon is the *effect* you have on Alphas,’ Hannibal replies. ‘You say heat turns you into a drooling mess; I feel the same whenever I smell your scent.’

‘Then you hide it well,’ Will says, grinning at the mere *idea* of Hannibal drooling. ‘Behind your mask of perfection.’

‘Don’t we all hide ourselves behind a mask?’ Hannibal purrs, lacing the words with dark insinuation. ‘You allow me to see some of who you truly are… But there is so much more to you than meets the eye.’

‘I’m a mirror, not a mask,’ Will says quietly. ‘Hold me up to your face and try to see behind, I’ll only show you the darkest parts of yourself.’

‘Your *mind* is a mirror, Will. Not you. You are your own person.’

‘With my own darkness,’ Will murmurs. He picks at a frayed thread on his shirt and his voice drops even lower as he whispers, ‘When are you going to take your mask off around me, Hannibal?’

‘I fear it has already begun to slip,’ Hannibal admits, setting his knife down and bracing himself on the granite counter. The conversation is hovering near dangerous waters, but he isn’t sure how to steer them to the safety of the shore. Will is so strong…

‘You still don’t trust me,’ Will says, the tightness in his throat making his voice hoarse. ‘Is it that bad?’

‘You’ll have to tell me,’ Hannibal replies. He clears his throat, bringing them out of the dark seduction. ‘Come to my office tomorrow. We’ll talk. Perhaps I can help you think.’

‘I’d like that,’ Will says, massaging his temple and forcing his jaw to relax before he grinds his teeth down. ‘Right now, I just want to sleep.’

‘Then rest,’ Hannibal says, light and firm. Nothing more than a concerned Alpha, protective of his Omega. ‘Save your thoughts for the daylight and listen to your body.’

‘Hm.’ Will gets to his feet, stretching the knots from his back. ‘You make a compelling case, Doctor.’

‘Sleep is always more appealing when you can barely keep your eyes open,’ Hannibal says.

‘Sometimes I feel like you’re watching me,’ Will laughs. ‘But you’re just in my head, aren’t you?’

‘You don’t sound too upset by that idea,’ Hannibal replies, warming oil in a frying pan.

Will hums again, and wanders into the house with the dogs. Tops up his glass with more whiskey before sinking into one of the armchairs.

‘I think a part of me likes it,’ he says softly. He adopts the same position as outside; head back, throat bared, and heavy eyelids pulled down to rest his lashes against his cheeks. ‘Knowing you’re there.’

‘Always,’ Hannibal promises, and Will smiles.

‘Controlling, possessive Alpha,’ he jokes, a sense of peace washing through him. This is perfect; his dogs all around him, the burn of liquor in his chest and his Alpha’s golden voice in his ear. ‘I’ll be there at eleven. I have a class first thing.’

‘Would you like me to keep talking to you?’ Hannibal asks, and Will feels a purr tickle his throat, even as he drifts on the stillness in his body.

‘Do you mind?’

‘Not at all,’ Hannibal replies. ‘I shan’t be offended if you snore.’

Will chuckles and sets his glass down on the side table. Underbite takes the opportunity to jump up and settles across his lap, lying on her side for a belly rub, and Will cards his fingers through the little dog’s soft white fur.

‘I won’t snore,’ he whispers, balancing the phone on his shoulder to rest his arm. ‘I just like listening to your voice.’

‘Then I shall talk,’ Hannibal says, adding the sausages to the sizzling fat. ‘And it will be as if you are here with me.’

‘In the armchair in the corner of the kitchen, with my eyes closed,’ Will replies, massaging Underbite’s chest.

‘The smell of sausage in your nose, and Chopin in your ears.’

‘I’m going to introduce you to jazz,’ Will breathes. ‘The heartbeat of the bayou.’

‘Please do,’ Hannibal replies, turning the sausages so that they brown evenly. ‘I’d love to share your passions, Will.’

‘Will you let me take you fishing?’ Will’s voice is barely more than a mumble. He’s not even sure he’s spoken aloud. Remembers his dream, even as he slips into a weightless sleep, Hannibal’s voice cocooning him in safety as he rests his aching body.

‘If you let me teach you how to cook,’ his Alpha whispers, slipping honeyed words into his skull. ‘Dream of me, Will…’

The answers will come.

***

The next morning, at eleven o’clock, Will stands up to the sound of Hannibal’s office door opening. He smiles when he sees his Alpha, and moves quickly to embrace him, nuzzling up against Hannibal’s smooth jaw as the other man wraps him in a hug.

‘It’s good to see you,’ he groans, sucking up Hannibal’s scent from the glands beneath his ears and shivering at the way it burns through his body. ‘Mmm… It was a very lonely night.’

‘Did you wake much?’ Hannibal asks, stepping back and showing him inside. Will hands him his coat, which he’d already removed in anticipation of the offer, and swings his arms at his sides while he waits for Hannibal to take his seat.

‘No,’ he replies, scrubbing at his cheeks. ‘No, I slept *well*, actually, just *lonely*… But I feel… *rested*.’

Hannibal considers him as he sits, inviting him to take his usual armchair. His Omega is flushed, his eyes bright, crawling with energy, and Will leans forwards, all but *bouncing* with the need to move. To *do* something…

Nine, maybe ten hours of prodrome, and then heat, Hannibal thinks, schooling his expression to neutrality as his mate explains his theory about the Copycat Killer. About the murders. Explains the connections he’s made.

‘I’m much better now,’ Will finishes, bowing his head and staring at the hands clasped before him because Hannibal’s silence is unnerving.

He rubs sticky palms together and looks up. Looks deep into Hannibal’s eyes. His Alpha’s ever-guarded eyes, and tries to make him *understand*.

‘I feel *clearer*… It *had* to be the fever.’ At the Alpha’s skeptical head tilt, Will growls. ‘I am *finally* thinking clearly about the Copycat.’

Stop, Will… It’s not time, yet.

Hannibal takes a breath, pretending to weigh Will’s words.

‘The murders you’re attributing to the Copycat have suspects,’ he says. ‘Whose DNA was found on the victims.’

Will scoffs and sits back in the chair, shrugging off the statement.

‘So what?’

‘You’re choosing to ignore that?’ Hannibal asks.

‘Both of those suspects are *dead*,’ Will says, his arms trembling. ‘I’m choosing to factor *that* into my psychological profile of the killer.’

He shoves up from the chair, pacing to the window because he can’t just *sit*. After waking before dawn, he’s had this buzzing under his skin, this… This *itch* inside that he can’t scratch…. He’s *so* close… He just needs a little more *time*.

‘Georgia Madchen followed me to Sutcliffe’s office; she witnessed his murder, she saw the Copycat,’ he says, pushing the words past the swelling in his throat.

Hannibal forces himself to remain in his seat, resisting the instinctive urge to chase Will. He can *smell* the thick, heavy Omega musk as Will’s body prepares for heat, and he can see the flushed skin on the back of his mate’s neck… In ancient times, Will would be released into

the wild, to run, and Hannibal would stalk him, find him, run him down and then, when Will could run no longer, mate him.

‘Why not kill her then and there?’ he asks, his voice tight with frustration. Without looking at him, Will shrugs. His hands are clenched in fists in his trouser pockets; he left his can of Beta spray at work, but he fiddles with his bottle of suppressants, and stares out at the crisp blue sky.

I want to run… I want to be free…

‘Maybe he didn’t have the time,’ he suggests. ‘She was an *unreliable* witness; that *bought* him time.’

‘So he framed her for the murder,’ Hannibal says, watching him closely. He *sees* the moment that Will stills, his dark shadow rising within him to scent the air, adding a smokiness to his delicate scent.

‘He wasn’t planning on framing *her*,’ Will whispers. He turns to look at Hannibal, blue-gold eyes wide with realization. ‘He was planning on framing *me*.’

I was, Hannibal thinks, and he suppresses the purr tickling his chest. Locks himself into his seat to keep from pinning Will up against the ladder and fucking him senseless.

‘You believe this is personal?’ he asks lightly, and Will moves again, wandering to the couch.

‘If it wasn’t before… it is now,’ he says grimly. He frowns, still moving. Still *stalking* Hannibal, whether he realizes it or not. The effect is… disconcerting. ‘This could be someone at the bureau, someone in the police department… someone who *knows* the crimes and has *access* to the investigations.’

Hannibal turns his head and looks Will straight in the face, allowing his eyes to flash red for just a moment. A warning to *stop* hunting him.

‘Someone like you?’

Will huffs, but his shoulders drop. The submission is subtle; he is still too fixated, too focused, to surrender entirely, and he remains standing over his seated Alpha.

‘There will be evidence,’ he rasps. ‘I found a pattern, and now I’m going to reconstruct his thinking.’

My stubborn, clever boy… Hannibal feels his chest tightening and his stomach flips at the dark *passion* in Will’s eyes. Burning like black fire amidst the gold…

‘How do you intend to do that?’ he asks, feeling his pulse in his throat. His fingertips. *It’s been a long time since I was nervous*.

‘By taking Abigail back to Minnesota,’ Will says. ‘Start where the Copycat started; when he called Garrett Jacob Hobbs.’

Panic flares and Hannibal looks down, just in case it shows in his eyes.

‘Will,’ he says sharply, and he catches his Omega’s flinch at the reprimand. ‘This is venturing into the paranoid. I can’t allow you to pull Abigail into your delusion.’

‘This *isn’t* a delusion!’ Will insists, shaking his head quickly, his breath catching. ‘I’m not hallucinating. I haven’t lost time. I am *awake*, and this is *real*.’

He strides back to the window, his back to the Alpha, and Hannibal looks over at his desk, at the scalpel gleaming in the lamplight. He sighs.

‘You might not like what you find,’ he warns. Will looks back at him, brows drawn together in a frown.

‘I already know I won’t,’ he says. ‘But I have to know.’

‘Why?’ Hannibal meets his gaze. ‘Why is this so important to you?’

‘Because people have *died* for it!’ Will spins, twin spots of color high on his cheeks. ‘Because I have to *find* him!’

‘You want to hunt him,’ Hannibal says, and Will takes a step closer, his eyes flickering a deep amber. Hannibal holds up his hand, inviting Will closer, and raises an eyebrow as he meets the hungry stare. ‘You want to kill him?’

‘I want to *stop* him,’ Will says, reaching out to slide his fingers over his Alpha’s palm and down his wrist. He’s marking him with his scent, his sweat, and Hannibal purrs, long and low. Will whines, sweat beading on his forehead, and he comes to stand with one leg on either side of Hannibal’s knee, leaning down at him as his Alpha draws him ever closer.

‘What will you do, when you find him?’ Hannibal asks, staring up at him with his obsidian eyes. ‘When you catch him?’

‘I don’t know,’ Will murmurs, tilting down until he wobbles, his heart thundering in his ears.

‘Will you kill him?’ Hannibal shifts, allowing Will to place a knee on either side of his thighs. He holds onto his Omega’s hips, rubbing circles into the plaid cotton of his shirt as Will straddles his lap, his knees on the leather seat.

Will moans softly, rocking forwards and then down, his erection pressing against the seam of his trousers and his boxers sticking to his slick-damp ass cheeks.

‘If I have to,’ he replies, leaning down to kiss the other man. ‘If I have no choice.’

‘There’s *always* a choice, Will.’ Hannibal pitches his voice low, almost purring the words to his mate, and he feels Will shudder even as his scent rises between them. ‘You *want* to kill him.’

‘Yes,’ Will breathes, pressing the word into Hannibal’s lips, his hands roaming his Alpha’s broad chest.

‘How will you do it?’ Hannibal asks, massaging Will’s back and ribs, speaking between open-mouthed kisses as his Omega rubs against him. ‘How will you kill him?’

‘I don’t know,’ Will whispers, cupping each side of Hannibal’s face, his thumbs sliding across his Alpha’s smooth, chiseled jaw. ‘I shot Hobbs.’

‘Out of necessity,’ Hannibal replies, and Will shivers against him. Their shadows bleed from their chests, twining and caressing in the space between them; blending into something deeper, something darker and more powerful. ‘If you could do it again… What would you do?’

‘I’d gut him with a hunting knife.’ Will nuzzles Hannibal’s temple, his brow, his eyes slipping closed as he imagines it. Imagines the blade sinking into Garrett’s chest, spilling thick, Alpha blood over him… His breath catches and he shivers again, rocking down against Hannibal’s answering hardness. ‘I’d slit his throat, the way he killed his wife, and tried to kill Abigail.’

‘Don’t take her with you,’ Hannibal says, breaking the moment and grounding Will with two firm hands on his hips, stilling him. ‘I can’t let you involve her in this.’

‘I have to,’ Will mutters, still trying to kiss his Alpha, even as Hannibal sighs through his nose and turns his face away. ‘You could come with us…?’ he offers. ‘Help me?’

‘This is something you must do alone,’ Hannibal replies, kissing him again. Will melts into the embrace, sliding his hands through his Alpha’s hair to deepen the touch as he sucks Hannibal’s tongue into his mouth. His hips jump and he moans, fire flashing through him.

‘God… *Hannibal*...’

‘Easy,’ Hannibal warns, holding Will by the hips to slow him down. To hold him still as Will tries to rut against him. ‘Take it slow, Will.’

‘I want to taste you,’ Will gasps, scrabbling to climb off Hannibal’s lap and sink to his knees in front of his Alpha. ‘I want you inside my mouth.’

‘Will…’ Hannibal pretends to hesitate, though he places both hands reassuringly into his Omega’s curls as Will leans forwards to unbuckle Hannibal’s belt. ‘Are you sure?’

‘It’s safer, right?’ Will looks up, wide-eyed and innocent, and Hannibal *feels* the hunger in his expression.

‘Yes,’ he lies, helping his Omega unbutton and release the zip on his trousers. ‘Come here, Will.’

Will groans as Hannibal’s scent, thick and rich, rises from the erection tenting his boxers. He falls forwards, nuzzling the hardness and the damp patch appearing at the tip. Licks and purrs the cotton, chuckling at Hannibal’s stuttered breath and the way his fingers tighten in his hair.

‘*Alpha*…’ Will’s voice is low, reverent, and he pulls Hannibal’s hardness free of the underwear, cupping the velvety skin of his balls and rolling the weight in his palm. He hums

his approval, darting his tongue out to taste the bitter pre-come glistening at the tip, and Hannibal bites back a moan at the rasp against his sensitive flesh. He holds very still as Will dips his head lower, lips kissing up and down the silky skin, teeth nibbling and hinting at danger before the entire length is swallowed down a hot, wet throat.

Hannibal hisses his surprise at the sudden change in sensation, locking his grip in Will's shaggy curls and bucking up to bury himself as deep into his Omega's mouth as he can. He feels Will struggle, fighting his gag reflex, and then the other man *swallows*, and Hannibal *does* groan. It's so *good*; so tight, burning and caressing; a perfect imitation of his mate's body. He allows Will to pull back, watching as the blushing man coughs and tries to wipe away the spit smeared across swollen lips, before he guides him back to swallow him down to the root again. He cradles the back of Will's head, pressing him ever closer to his wiry pubic hair, allowing Will to soothe himself with his scent there, and he begins to thrust. Slow, lazy movements, up and down Will's throat as the Omega stops fighting and *accepts* whatever his Alpha gives him.

Fuck... Will's body is burning up. He can't think. He can't *breathe*. He can't escape; all he can do is open his throat and keep swallowing, keep *drinking* Hannibal down… Maybe, if he fills his belly with his seed this way, it will be enough to satisfy his body's need for a heat, at least for a while…

He hums, savoring the bump of Hannibal's hardness against his swollen glands, tugging and rolling the hot, heavy balls in his hand. He digs the nails of his other hand into Hannibal's thigh, eager to leave a mark on him, using him as an anchor to keep from breaking apart. *This*… this is perfect… He's alone with his Alpha. Just them… And he's giving him pleasure; he's taking care of his Alpha… Milking him for his seed…

Hannibal can smell the subtle changes to the Omega's scent. He eases his grip on Will's hair, relaxing the experience for him so as not to push him into prodrome, and allows Will to move his head in time to the rhythm, rather than controlling it. He watches as Will's eyes flick open, gold-blue irises locked onto his burgundy ones, staring *through* him as Will continues to suck.

I'm yours.

Will tries to push the words into his gaze, to make Hannibal *feel* it. He swallows again, tasting and smelling the difference as his Alpha prepares to come. Hannibal's balls draw up; his abdomen tightens, and his hips give a twitch. Will smiles, humming again. He pulls back to add a blast of cold room air to Hannibal's skin and then gulps him down whole, rocking up and forwards, bowing over his Alpha as Hannibal thrusts up, again and again, spilling hot, thick seed down his throat.

Hannibal comes with a sharp cry, white pleasure crashing behind his eyes as Will mixes cold with hot and then purrs around him. He pants, sagging in the chair as Will swallows every drop, licking up and down his softening flesh to clean him up before kissing the oversensitive tip, gentle enough that Hannibal is able to force himself to hold still.

'Thank you,' Will murmurs, still nuzzling his Alpha's crotch. 'Thank you.'

‘I believe it should be I who should be thanking you,’ Hannibal chuckles, giving his hair an affectionate tug. ‘… Will?’

‘Hm?’ Will rests back on his heels, smiling lazily up at his Alpha as Hannibal tucks himself away. ‘Yes?’

Hannibal holds his gaze, allowing a flicker of his true darkness to show from behind burgundy eyes. He watches as Will stills, suppressing a shiver at the *coldness* in his expression, but he doesn’t falter. In this, he can’t. He needs Will to *understand*.

Reaching down, he cups the side of his mate’s face, his thumb tracing the sharp edge of a cheekbone before dipping lower to stroke Will’s beard. *So strong*...

When he speaks, his voice is soft; deceptively gentle, but the warning is real.

‘If you take Abigail with you, you will regret it.’

***

When Price and Zeller enter Jack’s office to give him an update that afternoon, they find the Alpha at his desk, deep in thought and staring into space.

‘Is this a bad time?’ Zeller asks, bringing Jack back to the room.

‘No, no… What’ve you got?’

‘We found train *tickets*, purchased by Garrett Jacob Hobbs,’ Zeller says, and Jack doesn’t miss the inflection. Lowers his hand from supporting his chin and raises an eyebrow at them.

‘*Tickets*?’

Price nods, almost smiling, bouncing with excitement.

‘*Two*.’

‘From the same train line that one of his victims was using,’ Zeller adds, his dark eyes gleaming.

‘Elise Nichols?’ Jack checks, and both Forensics Investigators nod simultaneously.

‘Found more instances of Hobbs crossing with victims,’ Price continues, flicking through the papers in his hand. ‘Dinner receipts for two, and two hotel rooms near the same campuses.’

‘We know he wasn’t travelling alone,’ Zeller says, his tone suggesting the significance of their find.

Jack sighs, his gut clenching, but he has to be sure.

‘He was travelling with his daughter?’ he asks, and Zeller tilts his head meaningfully.

‘They were *both* registered for the *same* orientation program at St Cloud State on the Mississippi, which is *where* the Nichols girl was going to school.’

‘Abigail Hobbs attended orientations at every school where a girl was abducted by the Minnesota Shrike,’ Price says. ‘Within *days* of the abduction.’

‘She was *with* him when he was choosing these girls,’ Zeller says, his voice soft, almost awed at their discovery.

Jack’s eyes flash red, a low rumble in his throat. He was right. He’s *always* right about these things.

‘She was the *bait*,’ he growls. ‘She was helping him *choose* the girls.’

Zeller nods, his breath quickening now, and he leans forwards to add,

‘The connection between the Copycat Killer and Garrett Jacob Hobbs might be *family*.’

As heavy as his heart is, Jack nods. The turns the idea over in his mind, considering it from every angle as he thinks aloud.

‘She kills Cassie Boyle to impress dad? She kills Marissa Schurr in memoriam; then she kills Nicholas Boyle to cover her tracks?’

‘But why kill Dr Sutcliffe?’ Zeller asks, playing along to help the Alpha work it out. ‘Or the Madchen girl?’

‘Because… she’s got a taste for it now,’ Jack says slowly. He frowns, his gaze growing distant again as an idea takes hold. ‘Or… she wants to impress someone *new*…’

Is that what you’re protecting her from, Will… Or is it you that she’s trying to impress?

***

About to head out for a late lunch, Hannibal pulls up short before reaching his office door. It opens, and Special Agent Jack Crawford strides into the room, his scent cloying and bitter, laced with worry.

‘Sorry to barge in on you, Doctor,’ Jack says, not sounding remotely contrite. ‘Couldn’t wait.’

Hannibal hides his irritation behind a mask of flawless neutrality, easily suppressing the urge to bare his teeth and allow his eyes to flash red. He forces the tension to seep from his shoulders and merely closes the door behind the other Alpha, turning to watch as Jack, bullish as ever, storms over to the armchairs before Hannibal’s desk, his hackles raised and anger pouring from him.

‘You wanna tell me what the *hell* is going on between Will Graham and Abigail Hobbs?’ Jack demands.

Hannibal takes his time closing the distance between them. His dark eyes are fixed, coldly considering, on Jack's face.

What have you found?

'Will has been the victim of many unusual and irrational thoughts,' he says carefully, and Jack huffs a growl.

'Has he *acted* on these thoughts?'

'Not that *I'm* aware of,' Hannibal replies, adopting an air of puzzlement. And then, because Jack is presenting him with the *perfect* opportunity, he adds a sly, 'Or *he's* aware of, for that matter.'

He sighs, as though debating whether or not to reveal a dark secret. Jack has, after all, just presented him with an ideal opportunity. He would be remiss if he were not to exploit it.

'But he *has* experienced periods of lost time,' he adds.

'Yes, I've *seen* him confused at crime scenes!' Jack snaps, allowing his frustration to get the better of him. 'I've seen him disoriented.'

'He may have been confused because he was waking up,' Hannibal says. 'Might not have known where he was, or how he got there.'

'Waking up?' Jack frowns at him, confusion etched into the lines of his face.

'From a dissociated personality state,' Hannibal explains. 'Not unlike an Omega pre-heat, in the prodromal phase. He would appear perfectly normal, and not remember a thing… But a fractured part of him would.'

Jack nods slowly, his eyes narrowed and jaw tight. *Right again. There is something more going on between you two.*

'And how long have you been aware of this?' he asks dangerously. Hannibal quirks an eyebrow, going so far as to offer a half-shrug.

'He's only recently started to discuss these episodes,' he lies, and is rewarded with another flash of red in Jack's eyes. The other Alpha is *terribly* beholden to his emotions…

'Well, unless "recently" means just before I walked into your office, you failed to mention any of this to me!'

The challenge, the *reprimand*, is clear in Jack's tone, and Hannibal raises his voice in response, reminding the other Alpha that he is no subordinate to be rebuked, and that he is not intimidated.

'Because I was trying to determine if it was trauma, and stress, from the work he's doing for *you*, or mental illness!'

Jack pauses, *listening* to him. Hannibal can *see* the barb to his words cutting deep into Jack's guilt over his mistreatment of Will's Omegan empathy. Satisfied, he returns to his soft voice, lacing it with another layer of sadness again as he continues,

'I thought it wise to be sure before making any claim about Will Graham's sanity.'

Jack sighs, his eyes shadowed with worry.

'He's taken Abigail Hobbs,' he says. 'You have any idea where they might be going?'

To Minnesota… Back to where it all started… You didn't listen to me, Will… I warned you, and yet you persisted. Stubborn, clever boy…

'No,' Hannibal lies, and Jack chews his tongue, most likely to keep from growling again.

'We have evidence that she was involved in some of her father's crimes,' he says. 'We just don't know *how* involved.' He narrows his eyes at Hannibal. 'Is it possible that Will *knew* what Abigail was doing? Is that why he's protecting her?'

There's a long silence, in which Hannibal puts the final pieces together in his mind. Jack *knows*. He knows that Abigail was the lure, that she helped her father choose the girls that he honored… and that she killed Nicholas Boyle. She will be hunted. Arrested… Unless…

Finally, he sighs, and closes his eyes as he resigns himself to Will's pain, his grief, at what must be done. He *warned* him…

I'm so sorry.

'There's something you should hear,' he says heavily, moving to his desk to collect an audio recorder. He opens the file and forwards to the part he wants; meticulous record keeping proves useful when framing someone for your murder, after all.

He hits 'play' and his own voice, tinny from the speakers, drifts up from the table.

"'How did you feel; seeing Marissa Schurr impaled in his antler room?'"

And Will's response, so open and trusting, not realizing he was being recorded. That Jack would someday hear his voice, and clench his teeth as the doubt in his mind blossoms into full suspicion.

"'Guilty.'"

"'Because you couldn't save her?'" Hannibal watches the Alpha closely, even as he hears his own voice. He waits for Will's response, for the confession, and he sees the *moment* Jack decides that Will is a suspect.

When Will whispers,

"'Because I felt like I killed her.'"

Hannibal's throat tightens. Will, his sweet mate, has done what few Omegas manage. He has formed two parallel Imprinting bonds on two Alphas; a weak one to Garrett Jacob Hobbs, and a strong, vibrant connection to Hannibal. He felt guilty on Hannibal's behalf; not because *Hannibal* felt any such remorse over the Schurr girl's death, but because Will *interpreted* the kill as his own, and added his own morality to it.

Of course, Hannibal says none of this to Jack, and the other Alpha's eyes burn crimson as he watches Hannibal return the recorder to the drawer.

'Where was Will the night that Marissa Schurr was killed?' Jack asks quietly.

Oh, Jack. How quickly you turn on those who call you 'friend'. Who you have sworn to protect.

'He was supposed to be in his hotel room,' Hannibal replies. And, as the final nail in the proverbial coffin, 'I knocked on his door. He didn't answer.'

Jack nods slowly.

'We *know* he was in Dr Sutcliffe's office the night that he was killed,' he says, resignation warring with angry determination. 'And Will was the last person to visit Georgia Madchen before *she* died…'

Hannibal sits down, an act not entirely false. He feels weak, relief and hatred mingling like acid in his belly as Jack so easily finds *all* of the evidence pointing at Will. *His* Will…

I will do whatever I have to, to set you free. To make you whole.

'This dissociative personality state you say he goes into,' Jack continues, '*Whose* personality is it?'

Hannibal glances up at him, no longer trying to hide the pain from his face. He pauses, composing himself, and then replies,

'He said he got so close to Garrett Jacob Hobbs, and what he had done… He thought he had Imprinted on him… Created a bond so strong he felt that he was becoming him.'

Jack quivers, his eyes bright with grief.

'And now he has Hobbs's daughter,' he says tightly.

Hannibal's eyes glow burgundy. He allows the pressure to ease, for the irises to change. He is, after all, emotional about Will's situation. That it helps convince Jack further is… convenient.

'Who Hobbs intended to kill…' he murmurs.

A muscle jumps in Jack's jaw and a nerve twitches beneath his eye. He sighs, clearly fighting tears. His pain is exquisite, and Hannibal can feel a purr building in his chest. He looks down,

swallowing the sound, and the tightness of the suppression adds a perfect rasp to his voice as he adds,

‘I’m so sorry, Jack.’

Jack’s tongue works behind clamped lips, but he doesn’t speak. He can’t. Hannibal watches, expression carefully painted in remorse until the other Alpha walks away. *You impulse, mistrusting fool…*

The moment his office door closes, Hannibal stills. He can feel how blank his expression must be. How coldly unfeeling. No matter. He has no one to pretend for now; he can be himself, and he must act quickly.

He needs to get to Minnesota.

***

Sat beside Abigail on Flight 317 to the Minneapolis–Saint Paul International Airport, Will knocks back a handful of heat suppressants and aspirin tablets, studiously ignoring the squirming, burning twist in his gut. Sweat prickles his scalp and dampens the collar of his shirt. He’s already changed outfits twice, but the cotton of his new top sticks under his armpits and his ass cheeks slide against each other as slick flows out of him like tears.

His temples throb, sometimes in time to his heartbeat, sometimes too slow for the fluttering, irregular pulse behind his ribs. His throat is swollen; two scent glands raised beneath his ears, pressing in on his vocal chords until he’s hoarse.

It’s not heat. It’s not. I’m just stressed.

‘You look a little pasty,’ Abigail says, grimacing at the sweaty, clammy Omega beside her. ‘Maybe you shouldn’t have checked yourself out of the hospital.’

‘I feel fine,’ Will snaps, gulping water.

Abigail pauses, pursing her lips at the rebuff, and then looks away with a roll of her eyes. She considers for a moment, and then says, deliberately casually,

‘It would’ve been my mom’s birthday’s next week…’

Except that she’s dead. She’s dead, Will, because you couldn’t save her.

She pushes her grief at him, and Will, predictably, turns to look at her, his brow furrowed as he senses her emotions, blue eyes flickering gold behind his glasses.

‘We were gonna climb Eagle Mountain to celebrate,’ Abigail continues. ‘Highest point in Minnesota, but…’ She sighs. ‘It’s not *really* that high… Less than three hours to summit.’ She shrugs, feigning casual teenage indifference again. ‘You can see Lake Superior from there.’

And Will, being Will, falls neatly into the trap.

‘I could take you… if- if you wanna go…?’ he offers, vulnerable in his hesitancy.

Abigail grimaces, confident in her regained control over him. She hadn’t appreciated being manipulated the other day, after all, and the rebuke just now had stung.

‘I think it would just make me sad,’ she says. Adds a quaver to her voice as she adds, ‘Some places are stained now.’ The words cut deep, catching like a thorn in his psyche, and Will turns away, allowing Abigail to look him up and down with thinly veiled disdain. Hannibal would never allow her to talk to him this way. ‘Some *people*, too,’ she mutters. ‘I know *I* am.’

The Beta sighs, slipping into self-pity once again as they soar above the clouds. Will looks at her, but he can’t bring himself to talk right now. He’s distracted; his senses assaulted by his surroundings. The cold lick of the air-conditioning in the cabin, the stench of urine from the chemical toilets and the cheap whiskey being swirled by the man across the aisle from him… The coughs and cries of passengers further up… The buzzing *disquiet* and agitation of the Alphas and Betas around him…

Hannibal… He needs Hannibal… Needs his Alpha…

Will reaches up, moving to massage his crest. He catches himself just before he can pull down his jacket collar, and moves to pinch the bridge of his sweaty nose instead, dislodging his glasses as he turns the motion into an eye rub.

‘Are you sure you’re alright?’ Abigail asks, her voice soft with what she realizes is genuine concern. As much as her emotions towards her legal guardian are… *complicated*, seeing Will is pain is upsetting. He *has* been good to her…

‘I’m fine,’ Will mumbles. ‘I’m fine, it’s just a headache.’

‘We don’t have to do this–’ Abigail starts, but Will’s choked off growl cuts through her words.

‘*Yes*, we do,’ he hisses. ‘I need to know.’ He looks at her, bloodshot eyes burning gold. ‘*I* have to *know*, Abigail.’

And the Beta nods, sinking back into her seat and staring out of the window as Will beckons the flight attendant over, ordering himself another double whiskey.

Abigail sighs, fighting to control the nerves twisting in her gut. She glances at Will, noting the tightness in the Omega’s shoulders; the set of his jaw. She knows that expression; her father had looked the same when he’d chosen a new girl.

Will is *hunting*, and *nothing* is going to stop him. Not even a heat.

***

The sun is already setting by the time they arrive at Garrett’s hunting cabin. Will pulls up at the mouth of the driveway and cuts the engine of the rental car, taking a deep breath to steady himself as waves of tingling heat flow up and down his spine.

Crows caw as they step out into the cold twilight. Snow crunches underfoot, and Will studiously ignores the steam curling from his skin as he uses his knife to cut through the police tape sealing the door.

The cabin sits still, waiting for them. A thick layer of dust, broken only by the pawprints of rodents, covers every surface, and cobwebs string across the ceiling beams. Will and Abigail are silent; each respecting the other's need to observe, to *listen* to the resonances and feel the memories of this place.

So much death… So much twisted love…

Abigail leads the way upstairs, her footsteps silent on the wood, and Will follows, his eyes adjusting to the gloom shrouding to the cabin.

I'm here, Alpha… I came back for you…

He's shivering. Sweat glistens on his cheeks, beading on his forehead and rolling down to dampen his beard. His skin is raw; the violence in the air slices at him like razors, bringing tears to his eyes. Even his *teeth* hurt.

Alpha… Alpha…

Maybe this wasn't such a good idea. Maybe Abigail's right; maybe he *is* still sick… Or… Maybe it *is* a heat… Stress can cause them… Trigger them… How bad would it be, to go into heat out here, in the middle of nowhere, without Hannibal… Without his *Alpha*…

Fear snatches his breath. Makes his heart race and his fingers tingle. Will swallows it down, squashes it behind the pulsing darkness in his chest and scents the air, tasting the salt of Abigail's nervousness on the roof of his mouth.

'The Copycat knew your father well enough to know about this place,' he murmurs, and Abigail's breath catches as she glances over her shoulder at him.

'*You* felt like you knew my father…?' What starts as a statement, trails into a question, and Will nods, blinking stinging eyes.

'I wanted to *understand* him,' he says, his voice rasping. He watches as Abigail moves away; drawn irresistibly closer to the antlers mounted on the wall. She *radiates* fear; fine tremors wracking her slim frame as she bows her head and twists her hands before her.

Will frowns, because as difficult as it must be to remember what her father *did* here, her level of distress doesn't fit…

'I felt like I *had* to understand him…'

He glances away, giving her space, and Abigail sucks in a wobbly breath before spinning to face him.

'Do you ever hunt?' she asks. Will's honey and blue eyes move over the gleaming thicket before coming to rest on the young Beta.

‘I fish,’ he replies, and Abigail hums.

‘It’s the same thing, isn’t it?’ she asks, her voice shaking. ‘One you stalk… the other you lure.’

There’s something in the way she says it… In the way her scent changes… Her shadow rises before her, darkness bleeding into the frigid air between them. Will’s monster sniffs, purring its approval, and he stiffens as his crest throbs. He *knows*… He *understands*...

‘Were you more fisherman, or hunter?’ he asks quietly, tendons grinding in his neck as he turns his head to look at her. He can feel his eyes aching; they must be pure gold now, glowing in the low light… He imagines he looks feral; half-wild and dangerous. But so is Abigail, despite the puzzled frown she paints on her face.

‘My dad taught me how to hunt.’

‘No, that’s not what I’m asking,’ Will says, and he turns fully. Dips his head and looks right into Abigail’s face, trapping her. Closes in and backs her up against the wall of razor-sharp tips so there’s nowhere to hide, the floorboards creaking under his weight as he stalks her. ‘All those girls your dad killed… Did you *fish*… or did you *hunt*, Abigail?’

And Abigail, young, sweet Abigail, stares at him with her big blue eyes as tears well… Her breath hitches as she considers lying to him again, before his darkness drags the truth from her in a ragged whisper.

‘I was the lure.’ Her brow furrows, and she fights the urge to licks her lips. ‘Did Hannibal tell you?’

Hannibal…? Hannibal knew? My Alpha?

Betrayal is a kick in the gut, pulling Will up short. His stomach twists and cramps, sending shooting pain down into his balls, through his thighs… *God*… He clenches up around *nothing*, a whimper catching on his tongue as more slick seeps out into his boxers. He shakes his head, tears mingling with the sweat on his cheeks.

‘No… he didn’t…’

‘He said you’d protect me,’ Abigail gasps, rocking forwards as she stares up into Will’s face, twin spots of color on her cheeks. ‘That you’d keep it a secret.’

Will stares at her, dark fire raging through him. His heart races. He’s so *hot.* So *alone*... Hannibal said he’d keep it a secret, did he? Said he’d protect her…? God… It’s too much… He needs… He needs…

He needs to *kill*.

His shadow rears, propelling him forwards and lending strength to his muscles. Will grabs Abigail by the upper arms and lifts her, shoving her back onto the antlers behind her. She gasps, blood flowing as the pale horns punch through her chest, just like Georgia Madchen…

See…?

Abigail struggles, choking to fill punctured lungs with air, and then –

Will comes back to himself, shuddering hard enough to spatter the floor with his sweat.

'There is something *wrong* with you,' Abigail hisses, her voice low and cutting. She's afraid, and trying hard not to show it. 'I think you're still sick.'

Will stares at her, at his daughter, at the girl who had pulled the wool over his eyes *so* completely… He feels *sick*. His head is buzzing. Pounding with pain, and there's a deep, gnawing *agony* building deep inside.

'Jack Crawford was right about you,' he manages, struggling for air. It's too thick; too dusty… He can't get enough into his lungs… He feels like he's drowning.

Will hacks out a bitter laugh, his fingers twitching into fists at his sides.

'He *knew!'* His lip curls back from his teeth and he growls at her. 'You killed Nick Boyle, and you helped your father kill *all* of those girls.'

'*No!* I didn't help my dad kill *anybody!'* Abigail cries, tears splashing down pinched cheeks, but Will *knows*; he *sees*, and there's no going back now.

'No, you *lured* them; you *killed* them…' His voice shakes. Catches around a sob. God, he's burning up… He shakes his head, trying to clear the ringing in his ears. 'How many other people have you killed?'

'You think *I'm* the Copycat?' Abigail cries. 'You think I killed *Marissa*?'

He's sinking… Becoming *other*… Will fights to stay awake, to stay *present*…

'If you didn't kill her, Abigail, then *somebody* you know did.'

'Ever think that somebody could be *you*?' Abigail snarls, her eyes flashing in the darkness as her fear gets the better of her. 'You were *there*. You *saw* Marissa. You knew about this place and there is something *wrong* with you!'

No… no… Heat swamps him. Roars to life inside him; a volcano erupting, spilling lava through his veins until his skin crisps to ash and floats away.

No…

Will grabs at his head, holding his skull together as the pieces shatter. As he fractures… As he falls apart…

He's fading. He's *dying*…

He needs his Alpha. God; he needs Hannibal *NOW*…

The buzz in his ears settles.

Coming out of prodrome is like waking from a nightmare; layers upon layers of realization, all of them bleeding into each other in a cacophony of sensory stimulation before he can pick them apart and *understand* where he is. *Who* he is.

A vacuum… He can hear a vacuum cleaner… Smell perfume and exhaust fumes… Hear the creak of cheap leather and feel the brush of air over his sweaty face… And, from very far away, a woman's voice, soft and hesitant, as though afraid to disturb him.

'Sir, I'm afraid you're gonna have to leave.'

He's trapped, halfway between worlds; between the dark, warmth of prodrome and cold, sharp reality. A whimper catches in his throat, and Will can *feel* his eyes flickering from side to side, locked in a dream state.

'We're preparing the cabin for the next passengers,' the flight attendant persists.

The sound of it, the words… It should make sense… *Preparing the cabin*…

With an enormous effort, Will wrenches himself up and out of his own mind, blinks away the last shimmers of black and gold from his vision. He shakes himself, nails digging into the armrests as he tries to ground himself. Tries to hold on to reality.

'I'm sorry… w-what? Where…? Where are we?' he slurs, frowning as he looks around at the empty seat beside him, all around him, at the Beta attendant standing over him.

She's worried; behind her careful, professional façade, Will can sense her fear at the clearly unstable Omega in front of her. He can almost *hear* her thoughts… *Where's his Alpha? Why do I always get the crazy ones? Should Omegas be travelling alone? He looks ill…*

'Dulles International, Virginia.' The Beta straightens, folding her hands before her. Waiting for him to move. To obey and leave.

Will grabs at the air beside him, his heart hammering in his throat. Panic whirs in his ears, threatening to spin out of control.

'Was there a young woman travelling with me?' he gasps, looking around again. His voice wobbles as hot tears burn their way down his cheeks as the attendant replies,

'All the other passengers are disembarked… It's just you, Sir.'

No… No, no, no! Abigail… Where's Abigail? What did I do?

'I… I can't…'

'Will.'

Hannibal's voice, so clear and firm, slices through the fog smothering him. Will jumps to his feet, half-falling as he pushes past the attendant to get to his Alpha. He's *here*. Hannibal's

here… How…?

‘Thank you,’ Hannibal says, enfolding the trembling Omega and nodding to the flight attendant from the top of Will’s damp curls. His mate *radiates* heat; his skin is flushed and he’s dripping with sweat. His scent rises, thick and heady, and Hannibal feels his belly tighten, his gut clenching up as adrenaline floods him.

He needs to get Will home; *now*.

‘Will, look at me.’ He cups each side of Will’s face, forcing his purring, whining Omega’s head up. Looks deep into gold eyes, at the pupils blasted wide, and sighs. He’s gone.

Hannibal removes his coat and wraps it around his mate’s shoulders, shielding him from rival Alpha eyes and cocooning him in the safety of his scent. Tucks Will under his shoulder and walks him off the plane. He doesn’t speak; Will is laconic at the best of times, but now… He can barely slur out Hannibal’s name, a litany of worship and desperation to be protected. To be claimed.

When they pass through the departure lounge, Hannibal buys Will an extortionately priced bottle of water and shakes out two scent suppressants. From the way a dozen or so Alphas are drifting closer, some unconsciously, others with open hunger on their faces, Will’s pre-heat scent is in real danger of triggering a pack rut…

‘Move very slowly, Will,’ Hannibal murmurs, keeping his arm tight around the smaller man’s quivering shoulders, ignoring the groping hands sliding beneath his suit jacket and shirt; *trying* to ignore the mewling little sounds bubbling up from Will’s swollen throat, or the syrupy sweet musk rising like smoke…

‘*Hannibal…*’

Hannibal purrs, long and low, walking Will towards the exit. He’s parked close, and he has no intention of stopping before they reach the car. A couple of young Alphas, college jocks by the look of their attire, try to jostle closer, their eyes flickering crimson as they bare fangs at Hannibal.

Will whines, snuggling closer to his mate, and then, with barely a flicker of warning, lunges at the nearest rival, hissing a challenge. An offer. Fight *for* him, or fight *him*. Prove his strength.

Hannibal, having felt the sudden bunching of Will’s muscles, steps to the side and kicks Will’s knee out from under him, getting a hand up to the blisteringly hot crest on the back of his neck. He squeezes even as he shoves Will down onto the dirty floor, and pins him in a brutal display of dominance. Of ownership.

‘*Mine*, Will!’

The younger Alpha backs away, smart enough to realize the futility of his situation, and Hannibal breathes a sigh of relief. A fight in Dulles International Airport is *not* a good idea.

Will needs isolation; he needs to be chased, caught, bitten and fucked. Mounted and claimed again and again until his heat burns out. They can't do that here.

Will's call, a high, quivering whine, punches through Hannibal's spine and grabs him by the balls, dragging him back to the moment. He staggers even as he jerks Will back to his feet, and smashes his lips against his Omega's mouth in a bruising kiss, more to silence him than as a display of affection. Will sags against him, needy hands once more scrabbling to undo buttons, to slide over his Alpha's flesh, and Hannibal realizes his own fingers are shaking as he tangles them in the other man's hair.

'We're going home, Will,' he rasps. 'I've got you, and we're going home. You're safe.'

Ushering his desperate mate from the terminal, Hannibal bites back a shiver at the cold air. It's late, and the temperature has continued to drop since Will left Abigail at Garrett's hunting cabin… Since he slipped into prodrome and allowed Abigail to run.

And run she did… Back to her childhood home, and straight into Hannibal's waiting arms…

I'm sorry, Will…

Hannibal guides Will down into the Bentley's passenger seat, stroking the side of his face in a gesture reminiscent of how he'd held Abigail…

I'm sorry I couldn't protect you in this life…

Hannibal starts the engine, but he reaches over and places a hand flat against Will's stomach, rubbing circles to soothe him as he drives. Will arches his back, purring at the touch, lost to his instincts. The gesture is deafening; hanging as an unspoken promise between them. Hannibal will do everything in his power to fill Will with his seed, and Will's body will cherish it, take it deep and hold it tight until it takes root. Until it creates life…

'The next few weeks are going to be difficult,' Hannibal murmurs, glancing down into his Omega's rapt face; into his sightless eyes. He may have Will's undivided attention, but it doesn't mean his mate *understands* him. Hannibal sighs, and Will squirms again, instinctively trying to soothe his Alpha. To comfort him.

The thought drags a bitter laugh from between Hannibal's numb lips, and he moves his hand from Will's belly to twine their fingers together, instead.

'I apologize,' he murmurs, eyes on the road as he drives out to Wolf Trap. To the wilderness around the little farmhouse. 'For my part in what is going to happen to you… For the deception… I hope, in time, you can forgive me.'

'I forgive you,' Will whispers, but Hannibal ignores him. His Omega is in no state to pardon his sins… He has no idea what lies ahead.

'Trust that everything I do, I do to *help* you, Will,' Hannibal continues, his voice catching with the strain of repressed emotion. 'I hope that, one day, you understand.'

Will squirms, sitting in a pool of his own slick. His skin is crawling, a thousand fire ants marching through his veins, and his clothes scratch like steel wire. He fumbles at his shirt buttons, at his belt. His throat throbs, and he struggles to swallow….

He's so *empty*… So *lonely*… He needs Hannibal… Needs his body, his touch…

'*Alpha…*'

'I'm here, Will.'

The glacier creaks, and Will's vision shakes. Black sparks drown him, a thousand stinging needles entering his body… He tries to cry out, tries to fight, but he can't move. He can't do anything…

And then, through the crashing, pounding *nothing*, he hears Hannibal. *Feels* his Alpha's lips on his… His hands…

Let go, Will. You can't fight it. Just let yourself go. I'm here.

He can't fight anymore. He's tired of fighting. Will nods, he thinks he nods, but he's not himself anymore. He's not *anything* anymore… He's just light and air and sound…

He's Hannibal's Omega, and he's in heat.

Savoureux

Chapter Summary

> Following his trip to Minnesota, Will vomits Abigail's ear into his sink. Hannibal convinces him to turn himself in, and he is taken into custody for her murder. When the FBI search his house, they find the evidence planted by Hannibal linking Will to four other murders, and name him the Copycat Killer. Determined to find a physical cause for his instability, Alana Bloom convinces Jack to transfer Will to a secure medical ward for tests and treatment. But Will escapes during the transfer and returns to Hannibal, seeking his help. His Alpha takes him back to Minnesota, where Will finally realizes the truth.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Alpha-Omega Hunt is the most primal of all rituals. Hannibal knows this; he has read endless studies on it, and dozens of accounts… But nothing could have prepared him for how it *feels* to stand at the edge of the forest surrounding Will's farmland, his panting Omega in his arms, and to *know* that he is going to chase after this fine creature; wear him down and capture him… Claim him and take what is *his*.

As thrilling as a kill… Perhaps even more so…

He holds Will up, supporting his shaking body as Will fights to both escape and throw himself at his Alpha. Snow whispers in the air, but the steam rising from Will is testament to the inferno raging inside him. Beautiful and deadly.

Hannibal stares deep into honey-gold eyes, at the pupils fixed even in the darkness. He cups each side of his mate's face, rubbing the bristles of Will's beard against his palms, and then he speaks.

'I want you to run.'

It's a chilling parody of their night after the opera. Will pulls his head back and scents the air, drawing Hannibal's smell across his tongue to savor on the roof of his mouth, to *know* who it is he needs to flee. He takes a step away, coiling in on himself as he prepares to bolt. Another step, instinct telling him to keep his face to Hannibal; to keep his eyes on the tensing Alpha.

'I'm going to chase you,' Hannibal continues, unbuttoning his coat so that he can move more freely. Will is fast, and he knows these woods… Hannibal will not risk losing him. 'And I *am* going to catch you,' he purrs, allowing his lips to curl back from his teeth. '*Run*, Will. *Now.*'

Run, Will…

Will bursts into action, but not as expected. He lunges *forward,* launching himself at the Alpha's midsection. The tackle takes Hannibal by surprise, and they both tumble to the ground. Will jabs a knee into Hannibal's gut and then scrambles up, half-slipping in the snow until he finds his footing. Hannibal grabs at his ankle but Will kicks free and then he's off, darting between the trees, a strangled howl hovering in the frigid air between them as he calls for help. Hannibal staggers to his feet, shaking off the leaves and dirt clinging to him, his hair mussed and a bemused smile on his face. His mate is truly full of surprises.

That's my boy.

He runs until his legs burn and his lungs are about to burst. After several miles, Will skids down a ravine and drops a crouch. He bows his head to catch his breath, his heart racing. He can feel his pulse in his fingertips, in his crest… Sweat plasters his hair to his scalp and stings his eyes. God… He's panting, jumping at every sound. His senses are too sharp, shattering the reality around him with a thousand tiny details. He can see the wrinkled bark of the tree beside him. Smell his sweet slick and syrupy musk, mingled with Hannibal's thick scent…

He has to keep going. He has to run. To escape. The woods are dangerous. *Hannibal* is dangerous.

The air shakes. Will can feel *himself* shaking. He's breaking apart… Fracturing… His reality is spinning out of control… Heat skids up and down his spine, throbbing wide circles from his crest. He starts to move again, keeping low as he jogs south. He can hear his breathing; the rasp in and out of his lungs. Looks up, and sees the silver light of the moon...

There's a distant growl, the sound growing closer. It stabs at him with icy fear, making his legs numb. Will stumbles, flinging his arm out and grabbing a tree for support. He swings around, ducking beneath a tangle of branches. Hisses as brambles snag his coat. Waves crash in his ears. He can't *hear* the Alpha following him. How is he supposed to escape what he can't hear?

But, he doesn't really *want* to escape. To keep running. He just wants to be held, but the urge to flee is so *strong*.

Why doesn't he fight? He could fight… He's not weak…

The ground suddenly falls away from him and Will yells as he trips. He crashes to his knees and tucks himself into a roll, protecting his ankles, his organs, his head. He's smeared with mud, twigs and leaves clinging to his curls.

A shadow moves above him, and his eyes widen. Hannibal is unbelievably fast, and Will barely has time to bring his fists up before the Alpha is *on* him, pinning him to the forest floor. Their mouths meet in a clash of teeth and lips, smearing blood between them. Hannibal's eyes glow like embers in the darkness, searing themselves onto the insides of Will's mind.

No forts in the bone arena of your skull for things you love…

He *does* love this. He loves the danger. The violence. Will bares red-stained teeth, daring Hannibal to hurt him. To *fuck* him, take him, claim him, right here in the snow.

Make me yours.

He reaches up to twist his hand in Hannibal's hair, dragging him down for another kiss. He wants to *break* this man; tear through his control and make him *real*.

Hannibal laughs, long and low, congratulating himself on his victory. He rips Will's shirt, scattering buttons to the night. Rakes bloody welts across the creamy flesh of Will's belly and chest, marking him as *his*. *Owned*. He lowers his head and bites around a hard nipple, sucking a mottled red smudge around the tender bud.

Will cries, throwing his head back to bare his throat in surrender. He is beyond words; lost to heat and drowning in sensation. His trousers cling to his legs with a mixture of slick and come, though Hannibal knows he hasn't even *realized* he's been shuddering with climax since before the Hunt began. It may have given Hannibal an unfair advantage; a heat-drunk Omega, barely able to move because of his erection and dizzy with orgasm… Leaving a scent trail so strong he may as well have smeared the trees with slick, but *chasing* Will was too great a pleasure to resist.

'You're *mine*,' he rumbles, nudging Will's chin further up to get at his neck. Locks his teeth and lips over the pounding artery and suckles a bruise there, too, drinking in the whimpers and mewls as Will rocks up and comes again, mindless with pleasure at having his Alpha so close. 'Say it, Will.'

'I'm yours,' Will gasps, grabbing for Hannibal's shoulders. He spreads his legs, bending his knees up to cradle the taller man against his throbbing erection. *God*… He *needs* him. *Now*. 'Hannibal… Hannibal, *please*…'

'I've got you.' Hannibal pushes up, heedless of the mud ruining his suit trousers. He kneels between Will's legs and reaches for his Omega's belt. Loosens Will's trousers enough that he can yank them down sticky thighs before snarling at the smell rising from the exposed flesh.

Good enough to eat…

He dips his head, rasping his tongue up the length of Will's erection. Only just manages to close his lips around the tip before Will is coming again, spilling boiling, sugar-sweet seed down into his mouth. The taste is like nothing he's had before; *so* raw and *humming* with power, and he gulps it down, unwilling to spill a drop. Will's body is so desperate to breed, to produce children, be that in his own belly or another's. It's like drinking life itself.

Hannibal hums his contentment, still sucking on Will's endless hardness. The orgasm did nothing to quell the Omega's arousal, and Will bucks beneath him, crying and shaking with how *good* it feels, even as pleasure borders on pain. He's oversensitive, overwhelmed with stimulation, and yet he can't stop. His balls glisten with the slick pouring out of him, and Hannibal rolls them between his cold palm, adding a dozen different sensations to Will's next orgasm. He swallows another release, silently marveling at his mate's flavor. Will tastes *wild* and pure; mountain streams, bloody kills and tearing flesh.

‘I love you,’ Hannibal whispers, releasing him to watch as beads of pre-come gather before rolling down the quivering length. ‘I love you like this. Roll over, Will.’

His Alpha’s voice is rough and low; catching around the growl fighting to break free of his chest. Will whimpers, kicking out at the jeans around his thighs. He can’t work out how to rid himself of the clothing, so he just flips onto his front and spreads his legs as best he can. Tucks his knees under him, resting his weight on his elbows to lift his ass in the air. Classic mating position; vulnerable and exposed. *Desperate*.

He calls for Hannibal, a high, keening mewl pitched to trigger the rutting instinct in his Alpha. Rolls his spine, flexing his shoulders to invite the taller man closer as clenching muscles push fresh slick from him. It dribbles down his skin, steaming in the cold air, and Will hears Hannibal’s breath falter at the sight.

Hannibal can feel himself slipping into rut at the sight of Will’s submission. He rips his own trousers open, releasing his aching hardness from his boxers, and groans at the sight of his Omega’s spread cheeks and exposed hole. Flushed red, he can *see* as slick seeps from between the ring of tight muscle, drenching the area in sweet musk. Only Omegan males look like this, and it is an exquisitely erotic sight; filling him with a fierce, animalistic *need* to mount, to *fill*. To *own*.

Pressing his palm between Will’s buttocks, Hannibal bites his lip at the *heat* pouring from him, *knowing* it is going to envelop him and burn an orgasm from him within minutes. He gathers up the slippery substance, sucking a fingertip and shuddering at the smoky, sweet taste before rubbing it up and down his length. His hips jump, and he feels pleasure coil deep inside, threatening to dismantle him before he can even enter his mate. Will cries for him again, beautifully frantic, and Hannibal’s heart slams itself against his ribs. He wants to crack his chest open, break Will’s body apart and shelter him deep inside, nestled alongside his own organs, where he can protect him.

‘I’ve got you,’ he whispers, taking hold of himself. His lungs punch out another stuttering gasp at how *hot* Will’s body is against the sensitive tip, and for just a moment, Hannibal isn’t sure he’ll be able to push past the wall of resistance. But then Will whines, and the muscles relax, welcoming him, and Hannibal pushes inside in one long, hard thrust, and it’s so *right*, so *good*. *This* is where he belongs.

‘Hannibal!’ Will falls forwards, rolling his forehead on the ground to bare his pulsing crest. Oh *God*… His Alpha fills him *completely*, stretching him to the point of pain, forcing him to take *every* inch of his width and length. Hannibal is *big*, and he’s only going to get bigger with his knot. But Will’s body is *made* for this. He *needs* this.

Tears roll down his cheeks. Will screws his eyes tightly closed, trying to remember how to breathe. He’s dizzy; black and red spots dance behind his eyelids, and he can’t feel his fingers or toes. But then Hannibal moves, pulling back with a sickening drag of flesh before pumping back inside, and the nudge against his prostate, the sensation of being *full* and *claimed* has him forgetting about air. Forgetting about *anything* that’s not *Hannibal*.

‘Breathe with me, Will.’ Hannibal reaches down and wraps his arms around Will’s chest. He pulls the shaking Omega up with him, rolling his hips and thrusting into the blistering vice of

his mate's body. White pleasure fights to overwhelm him, a dam ready to spill, but Hannibal concentrates on Will's responses instead, buying himself a little more time. He rubs and rolls a nipple between his forefinger and thumb, even as his other hand splays across a flat, quivering stomach. He can feel himself moving beneath the surface, and it gives him a dark satisfaction to know how *full* Will must feel. How *complete*, because of *him*.

'Who do you belong to?' he whispers, brushing his lips over the shell of Will's ear before nuzzling his damp curls. Snakes his hand down and squeezes the base of Will's erection, keeping him on the edge.

Will huffs a sob, wide, sightless eyes on the sky above them as Hannibal drives his pleasure higher and higher while denying him release. He squirms, rocking back and sparking a sharp pulse from somewhere deep inside, serving only to wind him even tighter.

'You,' he gasps, shuddering and twitching. 'You; I belong to you.'

He doesn't know what to do with his hands, so he just reaches back for Hannibal's thighs, holding tight as the feeling climbs. Moans when his Alpha locks his other hand around his throat, pinning him back against a broad chest and constricting his airflow.

'*Ha-Hannibal!'*

'Come for me, Will. That's it; come for me.'

Hannibal jerks Will's shirt and jacket collar down, scraping the material across his swollen, burgundy crest. He bites, sinking his teeth into the ridged scar and strokes Will, hard and fast. His hips thrust, losing any sense of rhythm, and they fall forwards together as white pleasure sends them crashing over the edge.

Will cries, convulsing as pleasure shatters him. He's *nothing* and *everything*. He's white and gold and red. It's *this*. *This* is what he's made for. This is *all* he needs. All he *is*. Darkness pours behind his eyes. His screaming mind is quieted, soothed by Hannibal's touch.

I love you…

His climax rips something in his chest, making his heart ache. Hannibal shudders, thrusting hard before he freezes, every muscle locking rigid as he pours thick seed into Will's body. He drops his hands to either side of Will's body, his weight pinning him. Curls his fingers into the muddy floor, gripping tight as he pushes impossibly closer, trying to sink *into* Will. To *become* him. To become one person, together.

His knot swells, aching and tender, coaxed ever larger by Will's pulsing, sucking muscles. The orgasm keeps flowing, waves after wave of red bliss, and Hannibal closes his eyes as tears splash onto Will's hair. It's *perfect*.

He's coated in semen and slick, sealed together with his mate. He hunted him. Stalked him, months before he chased him. Hannibal won his trust, and Will has given himself over, completely.

‘You’re *mine*,’ the Alpha breathes, savoring the trembles in his muscles as he settles into the afterglow.

‘I’m yours,’ Will whispers, and he can’t stop the purr from vibrating in his throat. There’s a bone-deep sense of *satisfaction*, and he risks ruining the moment by reaching out to twine his fingers with his Alpha’s muddy hand, bringing it up to kiss Hannibal’s knuckles. He stretches out beneath the taller man’s heavier weight, his endless hunger sated even as he bleeds heat into the cold earth around him.

‘Mmm… *Hannibal*…’

‘I’m here, Will.’ Hannibal kisses Will’s cheek, his neck, his shoulder; any part of him he can reach. He can *feel* the heat washing through the Omega’s body, like a creature trapped beneath the skin, skittering around seeking an escape. ‘Let go; I’ve got you.’

You’ve got me…

The dark current is there, in the back of his mind. Will is only too happy to wade into the stream, humming happily as he dips his head back. The hot darkness spills through him, lifting him up and carrying him away. He doesn’t want to *think*, just for a little while.

And then…

He’s hunting.

Will frowns. What the…? He’s still in the woods, moving between the trees with a rifle in his hands. He’s stalking the raven stag… Is this a dream, or a hallucination?

It doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter. His heart races. His pulse is fluttering, and sweat prickles his forehead. But all that matters is the stag. He needs to find it. Catch it… *Kill it*...

Will lifts the gun, his fingers tight on the trigger. Takes his aim…

A shot rings out, obscenely loud in the silence. It shatters his skull, sending splintering pain through his ears and down his neck. But the stag is wounded; it’s running, and he wants to *chase* it. Will gathers his feet under him and he’s sprinting, head low, feet steady, gun held high.

Time slows; he feels like he’s been running forever. Like he’s been searching for years… Sweat dribbles down his face, sticking his shirt to his back. Slick makes his trousers cling to his thighs, and he’s sure he must be dripping with every step. Didn’t he do this, already? Hasn’t he already been caught…?

The trees thin and he spots antlers. But it’s not the stag. A head turns and fear punches through to Will’s spine. He skids to a stop, his heart hammering.

What *is* that thing?

Fumbling for the rifle, he blinks and… it’s gone. Will swallows, fighting for breath. He’s still sweaty, but it’s cold on his skin now. Freezing him.

He doesn't want to go any closer. He doesn't want to *see*, but he *has* to… He has to *know*.

The stag's gone… There's blood on the trees…

Will searches the ground for tracks, but there's nothing there… He reaches out, his gloved hand smearing the thick crimson over his fingers…

He's not alone. He can feel it. The fine hairs raise across his arms and the back of his neck. His heart skips a beat and his belly twists.

Lifting his head, Will feels a scream stick in his throat.

The creature staring at him is death. Darker than the stag, with razor antlers rising like a crown from its skull. Leather flesh stretched tight over sharp bones. Every rib visible… It's a pitiful thing; emaciated, but *terrifying* in its hunger… Endless hunger… An insatiable *need* to consume…

I know you…

Will jerks awake, gasping for breath. His lungs feel too small and the world shakes around him. God… His head is splitting. He's in *agony*. Every muscles screams protest, but he has to get up. He has to… Has to…

The air shimmers. Bows in and out, shattering his bones. The *pressure* is crushing his skull. His face… His eyes are going to fall out.

Damp cotton scrapes his skin, and Will can't stop the whimpers of pain as he sits up. As he swings muddy legs out of bed. He stares down, trying to see beyond the twisting, blurred images. Muddy… Why is he muddy? Did he hunt the stag? Was he sleepwalking…? Was… was he in heat? He presses a hand to his forehead. To his chest. He can feel welts… Scratches all over him…

Where's Hannibal?

Fresh pain doubles him over and Will gasps. He needs to stop thinking. Needs to take an aspirin. He's having a migraine, that's all. He needs…

He raises an arm, shielding stinging eyes from the light seeping between the gaps in the curtains. Staggers out of bed, almost falling as the floor tilts away from him. His dogs are whimpering; Buster barks, but Will can't deal with them right now. He can't… he can't *do* this.

He's so *hot*. Why is he shivering? His skin is icy, but he can feel fire licking at his insides… His brain is melting…

Will makes it to the kitchen and gulps tap water from a cupped palm. His throat is sore; has he been screaming? He can't… He doesn't…

He reaches over, not sure if he's grabbed a bottle of aspirin or heat suppressants. He doesn't care. Just pops the lid and knocks back a couple of pills, washing them down with another

mouthful of water. It's cold, but his insides are still burning. He needs more. He gulps again, and splashes some onto his face. The whirring in his ears is getting higher, louder. His belly twists and he feels a stab of pain above his kidneys.

Oh *God*… He's gonna be sick. He can't stop it. His mouth is full of spit and his diaphragm contracts, filling his throat with acid. And then he's retching, bringing up bile and tablets and…

No. No… No, no, no, no…

This can't be happening. This can't be real.

Will's heart races, tripping over itself in his chest. The world rocks.

There's an *ear* in his sink.

An ear that he just *threw* up… He just…

Will shakes his head, backing away as panic overwhelms him. He can't… He *can't*… He's making strangled little whimpers, high pitched noises of distress only an Omega can make.

Hannibal. God, he needs Hannibal. He needs his Alpha, *now*.

***

Waiting in line to be served at a local organic coffee shop several miles out of Wolf Trap, Hannibal glances down when his breast pocket begins to buzz. He dips his hand inside and pulls out his phone, smiling at the caller ID; he hadn't expected Will to wake so soon.

'Hello, Will.'

'I need you.'

His Omega's voice is hoarse, and tight with barely contained panic. Hannibal pauses, excusing himself from the queue so that he can talk in privacy.

'Tell me what happened.'

'I… I can't…' Will huffs, his breath rushing down the line like static. Hannibal closes his eyes, feeling for his connection to Will. He can sense his fear, spiraling within him like a storm… His pain… Hot pokers in his ears… And a deep sickness, welling up from inside.

'I'm on my way,' Hannibal says, leaving the shop and striding towards his Bentley. 'Stay right where you are, Will. Don't do anything. I'm coming to you now.'

'Hurry,' Will whimpers, tears choking him. 'Hannibal… Please.'

Ending the call, Hannibal climbs into his car and begins the drive back to the farmhouse. He is careful to abide to the speed limit, and allows none of the twitching, fluttering emotions in

his stomach to show on his face. It's all coming together, reaching a crescendo, and Will needs him to be stable throughout.

He arrives in less than half an hour, and finds Will crouched on the porch steps when he pulls up. Stepping out into the frosty air, Hannibal sighs at the sight of him, so wretched and distraught. He approaches slowly, waiting for Will to acknowledge him.

He'd managed to pull on a pair of pajama trousers, but Will can't go back inside, even though he's starting to shiver. He hugs his knees to his chest, his scarred and scratched arms wrapped tight around himself as he rocks and waits for his Alpha to tell him it's all going to be okay. That it's a bad dream; a hallucination… *Anything* but confirming he *did* vomit an *ear*…

The pain recedes to a dull throb behind his eyes as Hannibal approaches, and Will manages to get in a breath between the bouts of nausea. He can't look at him; Hannibal will be so disappointed… So afraid… His copper-ringed eyes dart to the buttons on Hannibal's coat, his stitching, to his shoes, always so polished, always so *clean*… Where had he been? Was he not here last night…? What *happened*?

'I went to Minnesota,' he says, his voice shaking in time with his juddering body. Are his lips blue? They feel blue. He's bitterly cold; the heat seems to be focused in his head now. 'I took Abigail…' Tears threaten but he chokes them down. He doesn't know if he's already told Hannibal this… From his Alpha's silence, he assumes not. 'We… we went to Minnesota… Sh- she didn't come b-back with me…'

He finally, *finally* looks up, and Will's heart *hurts* at the bitter sorrow and regret on his Alpha's face. His eyes itch and he *knows* they've flooded gold at the pain he's caused the other man, but before he can whine, or make any noise of apology, Hannibal is speaking.

'Show me.'

Will is so terribly afraid; his scent is sour with it, and as much as this deception is necessary, Hannibal mourns the loss of his sweet musk. He reaches down, offering Will his hand, and pulls him into a gentle embrace as the Omega tucks himself under his chin. They don't speak, and, after a moment, Hannibal guides Will inside.

He sets the trembling man down in the armchair in the dining room, facing the kitchen doorway. Helps Will into a pair of fur-lined boots, and fetches one of the thickest, softest throws from the Omega's nest. He drapes it around Will's shoulders, offering both comfort and warmth, and only then does he walk into the kitchen.

It is a shocking sight. Blood-tinged bile, two melting heat suppressants and a severed ear, sat in the stainless steel kitchen sink.

'I don't remember going to bed last night,' Will mutters, drawing Hannibal's attention. 'I… I must have, but…' He sighs. Drops his gaze from the window to the chipped floorboards. 'Maybe I… I got up… Let the dogs out and then –'

'When was the last time you saw Abigail?' Hannibal asks, frowning at the sink. At the ear.

Here we go.

‘ – and my feet were muddy…’

‘Will!’ Hannibal raises his voice, short and sharp, cutting through his ramblings and making the Omega flinch. ‘When was the last time you saw Abigail?’

‘Yesterday,’ Will replies. He swallows again, his throat still burning. ‘At her father’s cabin. I… I had an episode… It felt like I was going into heat… She… she said something was wrong with me… She was afraid of me…’

He can’t stop; the words pour out of him, like pus from a wound, and all the while Hannibal stares at him with his obsidian eyes. *Waiting*.

Will frowns, blinking tears away.

‘And… and then she ran away,’ he finishes.

‘What happened?’ Hannibal asks, his brow creased and mouth a thin line. ‘Why was she afraid?’

‘I…’ Will almost laughs, but if he does, he’ll start to cry and then he won’t be able to stop. He flicks his eyes up at Hannibal. He owes him the truth, after everything his Alpha’s done for him. ‘I hallucinated that I *killed* her.’

And Hannibal, his stoic, strong Alpha, swallows and turns his face away, closing his eyes against the pain of Will’s words. It’s too much; Will feels hot tears spill down his cheeks, and his chest tightens in a vice that snatches his breath.

‘But it wasn’t *real*,’ he whispers. ‘I *know* it wasn’t real.’

Hannibal turns back to the sink. To the ear. Looks at the ceiling and then hurries to the side of Will’s chair. He drops to a crouch, his head in his hand, and rubs his eyes. And Will shivers, colder than he’s ever felt before. He’s never seen his Alpha look so lost… so helpless.

This is really bad…

‘Will…’ Hannibal swallows down the quiver in his voice. ‘We have to call Jack.’

Will wants to nod, or talk, or do anything, but a curious numbness has taken over. As if, with Hannibal’s defeat, his mind has switched off. Nothing there but fiery pain.

Shock… I’m going into shock.

‘You can’t run from this,’ Hannibal continues, reaching out to take hold of Will’s cold, limp hand and squeezing it between both of his own. ‘It will only be worse.’

The touch allows some of the muscles in his neck to loosen, and Will knows that Hannibal is waiting for his permission. For his acceptance. He manages a nod, a single stuttering movement, and Hannibal stands.

‘Get dressed.’

The Alpha strides into the other room, fetching jeans and a shirt from Will’s dresser, but the Omega can’t watch. He can’t do anything, and Hannibal has to help him pull the outfit on over his sweat-damp t-shirt and boxers. He can’t shower; that would remove evidence…

He leans against Hannibal’s shoulder as his Alpha kneels to lace up his boots. Follows him from room to room, always at his heel, as Hannibal tells Jack about the ear, and then feeds the dogs.

The FBI descends within the hour, invading his sanctuary with their harsh chemical smells and foreign scents. Bright yellow letters stamped on the back of dark jackets glow in the grey light of the overcast day. Bursts of radio chatter make the dogs growl, and tape outlining the edges of the crime scene flutters as snow threatens.

Will watches it all with quiet detachment. How many times has he invaded someone’s home, and treated it as nothing more than a pile of evidence to be picked over like a carcass? It’s professional objectivity, he knows, but the Agents’ faces are cold and impassive, and he inches closer to his Alpha, seeking protection from the judgment.

Hannibal is careful not to hug him, or hold his hand, no matter how closely Will stands. He leads the Omega outside when Jack arrives, and they greet the other Alpha on the porch.

Will can’t look at Jack. He’s put his glasses back on, but he doesn’t see the point of wearing Beta spray or using eye drops now; his career at the FBI is over. Maybe his *life*. Beverly’s team will examine him, and they’ll discover what he is; they might as well find out now. There’s no hiding from forensics.

Jack sighs, his eyes flashing red as he scowls at Will’s bowed head. His scent is burnt; he’s *beyond* angry… Somehow, Will doesn’t care as much anymore. It’s as if he’s experiencing everything through a haze… A veil of reality.

‘What are we gonna find in Minnesota, Will?’ the Alpha asks, his voice catching on a growl. Will stares at a fixed point in the air near Jack’s midsection. He can’t seem to make himself focus.

‘I don’t know.’

And Jack, the man who had entered his classroom and asked for his help, told him he was his bedrock and his Alpha, looks down his nose at Will, not bothering to keep the disdain from his voice as he speaks to the Agents behind him.

‘Go ahead and process him.’

I’ve never been so disappointed, Will.

He can *feel* the thought, and it clatters around his skull like bits of broken glass. Like a shattered teacup, because that’s what he is. Shattered. Broken.

Damaged goods.

Will steps away from Hannibal – he *can't* look at him right now – and two Agents move to flank him, showing him to the car. Zeller, Price and Beverly walk past, on their way inside to search his possessions. Zeller looks away, disgust written on his features. *I always knew you were wrong.* Price looks sad, but Beverly meets his eye, pain etched into the lines of her face. He's an Omega, after all; as an Alpha, she wants to protect him.

Hannibal steps up to the edge of the porch, his heart racing as a pair of unknown Alphas lead his Omega away. This… is more uncomfortable than he'd expected it to be…

Will climbs into the back of the FBI car, and then Agent closes the door on him. He won't be able to open it from the inside; that's how the backs of these vehicles work. He waits quietly, but then a dog whimpers and the sound tears at him, cutting through the detachment.

Winston stares up at him, head tilted in confusion. He doesn't understand why he can't go with him. Why Will is so upset. All the dogs are distressed, even as Animal Control loads them into their van to take to the shelter.

As he stares down into his dog's face, at the kind brown eyes and trusting expression, Will feels something rupture inside, and pain lances through his skull. His stomach twists and, for just a moment, he thinks he might be sick.

I deserve this…

Will turns away, ignoring Winston, and, after a moment, the dog is collected by someone else.

It's over.

***

Processing is filmed, and recorded by Beverly and her team. Zeller and Price start; they remove his outer clothes, and bag the contents of his pockets into evidence. Their voices are muffled; useless, unnecessary words barely audible over the crashing and whining in his ears.

Will doesn't care. He *doesn't* care anymore… Abigail's dead… She's dead and it's *his* fault.

What's happening to me?

'Keyring… two keys. House. Car.'

He stands, in just his t-shirt and boxers, muddy feet on a white sheet so that any debris can be collected from him. Zeller and Price stand to the side, and, distantly, Will becomes aware that Price is the one taking his items out of his clothes and bagging them, while Zeller confirms receipt and writes the details down on the check-in sheet.

'Right rear pocket, one leather wallet containing… $17 cash.'

'Right rear pocket, leather wallet, $17 cash.'

‘Right front pocket,’ Price says, turning the weapon over in latex-gloved hands. ‘One folding knife.’

‘Right front pocket,’ Zeller repeats, his pen scratching across the paper, silent in the deafening quiet between them. ‘Folding knife.’ He huffs. ‘Not very typical of an Omega, is it?’

‘Ssh,’ Price snaps. ‘Left rear pocket…’

Sweat trickles down Will’s cheeks, but he’s not hot anymore. He’s not really *anything*, anymore… Not *anyone*…

Did I go into heat with Hannibal? Did we Hunt? Chase? Or was that a dream, like everything else? Is he even my Alpha?

Once his items are catalogued, Price and Zeller leave, replaced by Beverly. She approaches him slowly, and her touch is gentle but firm as she lifts his hands and slides a pick underneath his nails to dig out the dried blood crusted there. Will is quiet, a part of him soothed by her presence. She smells like chemicals from the lab, but underneath the sharp tang is mango shampoo and her own, rich musk, laced with an Omega sweetness. Right, of course. She’s bonded… He always forgets. He’s never actually asked her about her Omega. Who they are. If they’re male or female… He should have taken an interest…

Beverly sighs, and sets the instrument down. Will considers glancing at her, but the thought doesn’t make it into an action, and he just waits. That’s all he’s really doing. Waiting.

‘I can’t do the silent treatment,’ the Alpha says. ‘I can’t pretend I don’t know you, and I can’t pretend we both don’t know what I’m finding under your nails.’

And Will, because he doesn’t know what to say, just stays quiet. Biding his time. Beverly sighs again.

‘Why didn’t you *tell* anyone you were an Omega?’ she asks, dropping her voice despite the fact that it really doesn’t matter anymore. ‘Why didn’t you tell me? I could have helped you.’ She moves away, working out some of her frustration with action. ‘You called me once because you didn’t trust yourself to know what was real. This blood is *real*, Will.’

‘I *know*,’ Will says, staring down at it. At the lurid red against the starkness of the white table cloth. He’s surprised he’s not more dizzy than he is. Maybe the pain is masking other symptoms…

‘Do you know how it got there?’ Beverly asks, a hint of frustration in her voice.

Will tries to look at her, tries to lift his eyes beyond her collarbone, but he *can’t*… He’s in trouble, he’s been reprimanded by strong Alphas, and now he’s submissive. He can feel the tilt of his head, exposing his throat, and smell the pheromones coming off him. *Placating. Calming*. *Apologetic.*

‘… Not with any certainty, no,’ he manages, very quietly.

Beverly huffs, and braces herself against the table.

‘Certainty comes from the evidence,’ she says, nodding down to the flakes of blood. ‘I didn’t wanna find any evidence on you. I wanted to be certain about who you *are*, but you can’t even be certain with yourself!’

Will ducks his head lower, his eyes bright with tears.

‘Not anymore,’ he whispers. His throat is thick, clogging up with the urge to surrender, to be silent. Not helped by Beverly’s anger. Her eyes flash red and she grits her teeth, fighting down a growl.

‘If you weren’t *certain* with yourself, you shouldn’t have been here.’ She shakes her head and rolls her eyes. ‘You shouldn’t have been here, period. This is the FBI.’

Anger flickers, just enough to rouse his sleeping monster, and Will’s shadow gives him the strength to look her in the eye. To meet gold with red, and challenge her assumption.

‘I was alright before,’ he says, managing to keep the wobble from his voice. Then, ‘… I thought I would get better.’

And Beverly, *Alpha* Beverly, is the first to look away, though she does so with another deep sigh at the situation.

‘You always said you interpret the evidence, so do it, Will.’ She nods down to the blood and dirt when Will looks at her. ‘Interpret the evidence.’

His heart sinks, and Will looks away from her. He doesn’t want her to see the pain on his face. The ripping agony as he says it out loud.

‘According to the *evidence*…’ He has to swallow, his breath catching as the fire in his skull peaks. ‘I *killed* Abigail Hobbs…’

He’s said it. He’s really said it. And, to his horror, Will feels a whimper clawing at his lips, fighting to be free. He sees Beverly shift, her eyes holding crimson as his smells and sounds of distress prompt her to react.

Will holds out his hand, palm down, fingers spread.

‘Don’t,’ he whispers. ‘Don’t comfort me. Don’t… treat me like an *Omega*. Just… Do your job. Please.’ He brushes the wetness from his cheeks with the back of his other hand, and licks salt from his lips as Beverly returns to collecting scrapings. They work in silence, and she doesn’t look at him again.

When she’s done, a new Alpha and a Beta officer escort Will to the holding cell. He strips, and they bag his underwear into evidence. Offer him cheap boxers, an orange jumpsuit and loafers, both men hesitating at the next step of the procedure.

‘Um…’ The Alpha fidgets, his eyes darting to the door. ‘We need you to, er…’

‘I’m sure his Alpha will understand,’ the Beta hisses, though he makes no move to take over. ‘It has to be done.’

Will breathes in slowly and deeply, counting to five so as not to be sick, and then lowers himself into a crouch. He glances up at the men standing over him, fighting a shiver as crimson-ringed eyes rake over his slim body and settle on his crest.

‘Thank you,’ the Alpha murmurs, adjusting his gloves as he moves to stand behind Will. He dips a hand lower, still shy about touching a bonded Omega, and clears his throat pointedly. ‘If you could, um…’

Will coughs, twice, and the Alpha nods. Rises and jerks his glove off as fast as possible.

‘Yep, he’s clean.’

‘Jesus; you’d think an Omega had never been arrested before,’ the Beta gripes, though he’s careful not to look at Will when he says it. ‘Was it easier? ‘Cos they get wet?’

The Alpha blushes, busying himself with the form in his hands. Will can feel how blank his face is, even as his heart canters behind the cage of his ribs. *‘Cos they get wet?* As if any touch sets them off… The Beta doesn’t have a *clue*. He can’t understand how *wrong* it feels to be exposed to anyone other than Hannibal. How much it *stings* to be touched by anyone other than Hannibal.

‘You can get dressed now,’ the Alpha says, gesturing to the jumpsuit. ‘Sorry we, er, don’t have anything more, er… suitable… For your crest.’

‘It’s fine.’ Will speaks automatically, his voice flat and devoid of emotion. But his eyes are gold; he can see in the reflection of the glass. No matter how much he tries to keep it down, the fear and revulsion at being naked in a room with a strange Alpha has his skin crawling and his body *leaking* pheromones. He’s surprised the middle-aged man hasn’t bundled him up into a hug by now, petting his hair and telling him it’ll all be alright.

He doesn’t ask to make a phone call. As much as he’s *aching* for Hannibal, to hear his voice, having the sound of him whilst trapped in this place would be its own kind of torture. Better to wait, until… What? He’s free…?

Will feels strong hands on his arms. No cuffs; the Alpha and Beta walk on either side of him, and show him into an interrogation room. It’s dark; lit only by muted lamps on the sound-proofed walls. He could scream himself hoarse in here, and nobody would know…

Bit like a padded cell…

‘Wait here. They’ll be with you shortly.’

Will’s not sure who’s spoken. He nods, and sits down at the table, facing an empty chair. Clasps pale, freshly scrubbed hands on the faintly sticky surface, and then he waits.

Because, as bad as it’s been so far, he knows, from the two-way mirror beside him and the steady red light of the camera up on the wall in the corner, it’s about to get so much worse.

***

A while later – in his vacuumed room, Will has no way of telling how much time has passed – the door opens. A familiar scent announces his visitor. Caramel and roses… warm summer evening walks and comforting sweaters, curled up with the dogs by the fire.

Alana Bloom approaches, and sinks into the chair across from him. Will watches, taking note of her swollen cheeks, smeared eyeliner and bloodshot eyes.

'Hi,' he says. His voice is low. Rasping. His throat tickles but he refuses to ask for a drink. He'd only throw it up if he did.

'Hi.' Alana's voice is equally hoarse, and Will frowns.

'You're flushed. You been yelling?' he asks. At Jack? He hopes so.

'Screaming is more like it,' Alana says, swallowing thickly. Will's jaw works, grinding his teeth against the tension radiating down from his temples.

'I could use a good scream,' he agrees, his gaze hardening, snapping fire as he stares off to the side. 'I can feel one perched under my chin.'

'Let it out,' Alana says, her eyes welling with fresh tears. But Will shakes his head.

'I'm afraid that, if I started… I wouldn't be able to *stop*.' He huffs, chewing on his tongue. 'I'm surprised *Jack* let you in here; given my *romantic* overtures.'

Alana's blue eyes widen a fraction, and twin spots of color flare on her cheeks.

'Jack doesn't know about your romantic overtures,' she admits. Glances at the two-way mirror, confirming that at least one of the Alphas in Will's life is watching. '*Didn't* know.'

Will nods, resentment resting like a boulder on his shoulders.

'Guess you dodged a bullet with me,' he whispers.

The tears in Alana's eyes wobble, threaten to spill.

'I don't *feel* like I dodged a bullet,' she croaks. 'I feel *wounded*.' Two slivers of salt track down the sides of her nose. Alana's lips flush red, and then she clears her throat, adjusting the folder on the table before her. 'I've been in touch with, erm, Animal Services… I'll go pick up your dogs in a couple hours. I'll take them back home with me.' She sniffs, and swallows again. 'And I'll take care of them until… whenever.'

'"Whenever" could be a long time from now,' Will reminds her. He doesn't bother to tell her that, technically, everything he owns now belongs to Hannibal… His Alpha has hardly bonded with the dogs, and Alana has more experience. He can't imagine the pack in Hannibal's Baltimore townhouse, shedding fur all over his Persian rugs and hardwood floors…

‘I’ll take care of them until then,’ Alana promises. It’s the first real kindness he’s felt since leaving Hannibal’s side; a moment of warmth to melt some of the ice around his heart. It threatens to tear him apart, but Will manages to choke down the misery.

‘Thank you,’ he whispers, picking at the dried skin around his nails. The soap in the holding cell has wreaked havoc on his sensitive Omega skin, and now he can feel it chapping in the conditioned air.

Pleasantries over, Alana dries off her face and opens her folder. She sits forwards, brisk and business-like.

‘We have to do some tests,’ she says. ‘They’ll be the standard psychopathy tests.’

And, even as *everything* in him cringes and rebels against it, Will forces himself to nod.

‘I suppose you’re gonna ask me to draw a clock while you’re at it,’ he says, and Alana frowns, leaning forwards.

‘Did Hannibal ask you to draw a clock?’

Will raises his eyes, fighting to keep the tears from spilling, and has to swallow back the lump in his dry throat before he can reply.

‘He said it was an exercise… To ground me in the present moment.’ His lips curve into a bitter smile and he chokes out a laugh. ‘A *handle* to help me hold onto reality.’

Really didn’t work out so well, did it?

‘Was the clock normal?’ Alana asks, and Will shrugs, his breath whistling in and out of too-small lungs.

‘Would I be here if it wasn’t?’

Alana considers him for a moment, hope sparking cold fire in her eyes. She withdraws a sheet of blank paper from her folder, and places it on the table in front of Will before handing him her pen.

‘Draw me a clock,’ she says, and Will stares, faintly incredulous, before sighing heavily. What does it matter? Fine. He’ll draw a fucking clock.

He grabs the pen and creates a circle. Adds the numbers around the edges and then, because he has no idea what time it *really* is, puts the hands showing it as 3pm.

Spins the page and hands it back to Alana, who stares, aghast, at the numbers and lines skidding off the edge of a wonky circle.

‘See?’ Will says, his voice shaking, heavy with despair. ‘It’s just a normal clock. Telling the *time* isn’t my problem.’

Alana can feel fresh tears wet her eyes, but her lips curve into a tiny, hopeful smile. She'd *known* there was a physical underlying cause. Something to explain it all away. Now, she just needs to find out *what*.

'It's the least of your problems.'

***

Sitting in his therapist's sitting room, Hannibal feels an uncomfortable swell of emotions in his chest. Bedelia has drawn the curtains to hide the sunny day as a sign of respect for his sorrow, but Hannibal's stomach is tight, his shoulders ache, and he isn't entirely sure *why*. He planned this, after all. Carefully maneuvered Will into this situation, to help him… But the sense of *fear* and *pain* from his Omega, no doubt sick to his stomach at being touched by strangers, has him reeling.

Hannibal wets his lips. Pauses. Swallows.

'It seems hard to find words today.' Two tears slide down his cheeks, splashing onto the hands clasped on his lap. He has no intention of revealing the truth of his relationship with Will to Bedelia, but perhaps he can discuss the situation through the lens of the Beta's demise. 'Despite the overwhelming evidence, I find myself searching for ways that Abigail could still be alive.'

When Bedelia speaks, her voice is pitched low and smooth. She has a classic Alpha's voice, and Hannibal takes comfort in the calculated emotion he can detect in her tone. Professional, feigning a little more than she truly feels, trying to hide a quiver of unease.

Smart girl.

'Grieving is an individual process with a universal goal,' Bedelia says. 'The truest examination of the meaning of life, and the meaning of its end.'

She raises an eyebrow at Hannibal, tilting her head to draw him in. The light catches in her golden hair, smooth as silk, perfectly curled to sit just below her shoulders… Hannibal allows himself a moment's distraction as he takes in the sharp, clean edges of her outfit; her high heels and classic, sophisticated dress. He has always appreciated her *neatness*. But, he cannot be distracted.

'I know what life means,' he replies, turning his face away. *Life* is fleeting; a collection of experiences and emotions. Over in the blink of an eye. Snuffed out with a single act of violence… But… perhaps it is a moment of pure, uncomplicated happiness… He sighs. 'We've existed for a hundred thousand years. In that time, a hundred *billion* human lives have had beginnings and ends.'

None of them special. None of us special…

'A hundred billion lives haven't impacted yours,' Bedelia points out. 'But, clearly, Abigail Hobbs's life *has*, and you seem… *surprised* by that.'

Hannibal trembles, his eyes still swimming.

Not Abigail… Will. Will is special…

He feels his heart skip a beat, aching for the family he'd wanted to create with the other man.

'I never considered having a child,' he says quietly. 'But, after meeting Abigail, I understood the appeal.' *We could have been so happy together.* 'The opportunity to guide and support and, in many ways, direct a life.'

Will's life, through Abigail.

'You were having influence on her,' Bedelia suggests. It's almost a question.

'I was hoping I was,' Hannibal replies. *As I had influence on Will.*

Bedelia sits forward, locking her hands around her knee.

'Young people are supposed to be the lenses through which we see ourselves living beyond this life.'

Hannibal blinks again, allowing more tears to fall. Forces down the tightness in his throat, and ignores the rasp to his voice.

'I think of my earliest memory, and project forward to what I imagine will be my death. I never think about living beyond that span of time… Except by reputation.'

My legacy… My work. Not as a father…

'Even after this loss?' Bedelia asks, and Hannibal lifts his chin a fraction.

'More so, after this loss.'

Bedelia narrows her eyes, seeing through the carefully constructed façade. Her words, when she speaks, are soft, but deadly as a knife.

'Will Graham is a loss, too.'

At the name, Hannibal's heart pauses. It stumbles over itself in its haste to beat faster behind his ribs. A quiet, observing part of Hannibal notices this change, and studies it for the curious effect the mere *thought* of his Omega has on his body. A physiological response, beyond his immediate control.

'You might grieve *him* as a loss, too,' Bedelia continues, but the warning flicker of red in Hannibal's eyes silences her.

'I haven't given up on Will,' he says sharply. Bedelia, gracious as ever, simply sits back and takes a deep breath.

'If they *do* find him guilty of killing Abigail Hobbs –'

‘*When*.’ Hannibal huffs a sad, bitter laugh. ‘Let’s be honest.’

I was very thorough.

‘– I don’t recommend you participate in any rehabilitation effort,’ Bedelia finishes, her tone cautious. ‘As his *therapist*… or as his Alpha.’

Hannibal sighs, barely glancing at her, despite the admission.

‘I was so confident in my ability to help him. To *solve* him.’

‘To save him,’ Bedelia says, and Hannibal takes the offering. Spins out another line of grief; a silken thread to snare and trap this person in his life.

‘Saving him, I lost Abigail.’

I had to make a choice. I chose Will. I will always choose Will.

Hannibal stares off to the side, tracking the faint sense of distress from his mate. Will’s mind has been buzzing with panic, but the numb silence, no longer fleeting, is somehow more shattering. Will feels… broken. Defeated. *That* is what brings tears to Hannibal’s eyes. Knowing that his Omega is suffering.

‘It’s hard to accept that I could fail them both so profoundly,’ he says, his voice breaking.

Bedelia speaks again, but Hannibal barely acknowledges the words, focused instead on the sliver of worry tickles the edge of his mind. It is a moment’s weakness, where he wonders if this is the right thing to do… If he hasn’t plotted a course of action destined to destroy his relationship with the other man…

No. No doubt. I must be as strong as Will, now. We will survive this… He is going to shatter, and his mind will break, but I will be there to rebuild him as he should be. My killer. My equal. My love.

***

Gently unwinding the thread of Will’s latest fishing lure, Jimmy Price can’t help but wonder at the *intricacy* that goes into his former colleague’s work. *Such detail*.

Jack’s voice, rough with grief, a near-constant growl itching at his throat, cuts into his concentration.

‘Okay, Jimmy; what’ve you got?’’

‘Erm…’ Jimmy hesitates, but the evidence is indisputable, laid out beneath the bright glare of the fluorescent bulbs for everyone to see. The whole team is here; Beverly stands in the middle, Zeller on her other side, with Alana Bloom and Jack facing them. ‘Well, as you know, Will is a big fly fisherman, and he designs all of his own lures.’

Jack nods; he's seen them, on the desk beneath the big window in the farmhouse. An unusual hobby, for an Omega, but Will's never been normal.

'Most anglers use feathers, fur, twine, bits of shell,' Price continues, demonstrating his somewhat limited knowledge of the craft. 'They design each lure to catch a specific fish.'

'This one caught my eye,' Beverly says, gesturing to a lure beneath her. 'I noticed the hair color.' She looks sick. 'Took me a few to accept what I was seeing… I ran a chem-set to confirm the connection.'

'What connection?' Alana asks, her brow furrowed with worry.

'Four of the lures are made from materials including human remains,' Beverly says, her mouth forming a tight line.

'And we have a DNA match for all of them,' Price adds, stepping in where his Alpha falters. Beverly nods her thanks, and wets her lips.

'This one is Cassie Boyle,' she says, gesturing to a red and black feathered lure. 'Bits of bone fragments, and pieces of lung. Marissa Schurr; antler velvet, a fingernail, wound with her hair. Dr Sutcliffe; crushed teeth, soft tissue from inside his mouth, bound with cartilage from inside his jaw.'

Jack exchanges a glance with Alana; the Beta is clearly reeling from this discovery. He frowns at his forensics team.

'All victims of the Copycat?' he checks, and they nod.

'And this last lure was made with hair and fiber that match Georgia Madchen,' Price concludes.

'He took trophies of all his victims,' Zeller says quietly, dark eyes flashing with undisguised contempt.

Jack's scoff rumbles with a snarl, making the Beta flinch.

'Trophies?' the Alpha snaps. 'So now Will Graham's a *serial killer?* Who takes trophies?'

'Something's wrong with Will *physically*,' Alana explains. 'Neurologically. He's *not* a serial killer.'

But, despite her statement, she can't help but glance down at the tray of evidence. And Jack looks away, rubbing his eyes and pinching the bridge of his nose as he searches for *anything* that could make this all a bad dream. Anything but the truth.

Because the truth looks very, *very* bad.

***

Alone in the interrogation room, Will drifts on the feeling of fire and ice inside him. His skin leaks sweat, dampening the collar of his jumpsuit to rasp against the top of his crest. It hurts, but he doesn't bother to move it. He doesn't care enough. He's been sat in the same position for what feels like hours. It may have actually been hours; he doesn't know. He can't *think*. His brain spins like tires on ice, locked in place by mute panic, only one resounding truth pounding behind his forehead.

I'm in trouble.

His skin prickles, and Will opens his eyes. His vision buckles in around him before the table swims into focus. He can feel the fine hairs rise on his arms, the nape of his neck…

He's being watched.

He turns to the mirror. There's nothing there, but he *knows* he's not alone. Someone is reaching out for him… Some*thing*.

Will stands, half-surprised that his legs are holding him up. He feels dizzy, and numb… But he approaches the glass, staring at his own reflection. Staring *through* his own reflection.

He looks awful. Grey skin shining with sweat, sunken cheeks and dull, amber-ringed eyes set inside bruised sockets… His jumpsuit clings under his armpits and sticks to the slick on his thighs, creasing with every step he takes…

Where are you…?

Will tries to see *beyond* the mirror… Beyond the gleaming reflection into the darkness hidden on the other side. There's something there, just out of reach. A monster, hidden beneath the surface, just out of sight. And, as realization begins to take form, emaciated and starving, Will feels a pull from somewhere so deep inside he's not even sure it's within his own body.

I miss Hannibal.

'You're sick, Will.'

Jack's voice, close and loud and real, wrenches Will back to reality. He's still sat, sweating in his jumpsuit on the padded plastic seat. The Alpha's scent, whilst not as burned as before, still smells like fire and smoke. Like *disappointment*.

Will knows he has to speak.

'I wasn't consistent in taking my medication,' he mumbles. 'The fever came back.'

Jack sighs, and moves again. He's stalking back and forth behind Will, refusing him the comfort of seeing him. *Maybe he can't stand to see my face*, Will thinks.

'We're gonna move you to a secure medical ward,' Jack says, slowly circling the table with his hands in his pockets. 'And we're gonna get to the bottom of… whatever it is that's wrong with you, and we're gonna make *sure* that you get whatever kind of treatment you need.'

‘And then what?’ Will asks, one side of his upper lip curling into a sneer. ‘Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane? Have Chilton *fumbling* around in my head?’

‘This job doesn’t generally lend itself to optimism, alright?’ Jack glances back over his shoulder at Will, his expression hard. ‘But I desperately want to be optimistic about an alternative to what every fiber of the evidence is telling me you’ve done.’

Will feels his shadow quicken, slithering up his spine and hissing at the insinuation. He knows his eyes are probably glowing gold, but he doesn’t care anymore.

‘I can’t confess to something I don’t *remember*,’ he snaps, and Jack growls.

‘The *question* is: how much *more* is there that you “don’t remember”?’ The cynical quotation marks are evident in his tone, as much as he tries to hide them. Will looks up at him, trying for a puzzled frown but not sure if his features have arranged themselves into anything more than calm rest.

‘We found your fishing lures,’ Jack explains, and this time Will *does* frown, if only for a moment.

‘Yeah, I should hope so,’ he says. ‘They were on my desk, right by the front door.’

‘We found human *remains* amongst the materials that you made them from,’ Jack says, coming closer and resting his fists on the table. He leans in, looming over Will, a classic Alpha position radiating dominance and power. ‘The human remains of Cassie Boyle, Marissa Schurr, Donald Sutcliffe, Georgia Madchen…’

They think I took trophies… They think… They think I’m the Copycat Killer…

Will’s heart forgets how to beat. His lungs forget how to breathe. His lips tingle, but he can’t seem to make his body respond to the instructions from his brain.

‘No…’ he whispers, staring at Jack, *begging* him with wide, fearful eyes.

‘*Yes*,’ Jack replies, and the reply is somehow worse, even though it loosens Will’s throat enough to suck in a shallow breath.

‘I wasn’t…’ He falters, trying to understand. *How can this be happening? How is this happening to me?* ‘I wasn’t *sick* when Cassie Boyle was murdered. I wasn’t *sick* when Marissa Schurr was murdered…’

Jack’s eyes flicker red and he shakes his head.

‘*That’s* not an argument you wanna be making right now,’ he says. ‘Not with me.’

Will swallows, and pulls his head back in a vague attempt at a nod. Right…

‘Because then I’d be a psychopath,’ he says, and Jack pins him in place with red-ringed eyes. Cold eyes, devoid of compassion for him. Will feels the rejection like a kick in the gut.

‘My biggest fear,’ Jack says, ‘is that we’ll *learn* that you knew what you were doing the whole time.’

‘You don’t have to be afraid of that, Jack,’ Will says, his voice very quiet. His heart, now that it’s beating again, is beating very quickly, sending blood and adrenaline through his system. Getting him ready to flee. Or fight. Because he understands, now. It all makes *sense*. ‘There *is* something you should be afraid of, though,’ he adds, staring blankly ahead as the final pieces slot together into one moment of sickening clarity.

‘Yeah, what’s that?’

‘Whoever’s *doing* this to me,’ Will says. Jack doesn’t hide the disdain from his expression, or his voice.

‘Someone’s *doing* this to you?’ he sneers.

‘They’ll be close to you,’ Will warns. ‘It could be someone here. Working with you.’

Jack straightens up, scoffing in the back of his throat.

‘So, that’s it? It’s a set-up?’

‘They know the cases,’ Will persists, ignoring the look of derision on the Alpha’s face. ‘They know forensics…’ Another realization, and Will can’t help but sob a laugh as tears well in his eyes at the *cruelty* of it. ‘They know I’m unstable… That I’m an Omega…’

‘Can you *hear* how paranoid you sound?’ Jack asks, his voice tight with frustration.

‘*Or*,’ Will reasons, looking up with his big, doe-eyes, because, oh, wouldn’t that be *just* perfect? ‘It could just be *you*… But…’ He snorts, almost choking on the fear squeezing his throat. ‘But, then I’d be *really* screwed, wouldn’t I?’

Jack sighs again. This must be so hard for *him*. Will watches as the Alpha eases himself into the chair opposite him, smoothing down his tie before clasping his hands on the table before him.

‘I wanted to be the one to do this,’ Jack says heavily, and Will knows what’s coming. He knows, and he’s been expecting it, but his stomach still drops out when the words leave Jack’s mouth. ‘Will Graham. You’re under arrest for murder. You have the right to remain silent.’

He closes his eyes, waiting for the room to stop spinning. Waiting for his world to stop collapsing.

Hannibal… Where are you?

A new Alpha officer comes to take him to the ambulance when it’s time. He buckles a belt around Will’s waist, and cuffs his wrists and ankles to it with steel chains that clank with every step. Will keeps his head low, not so much that the jumpsuit pulls down to reveal his crest, but enough that the officer senses his submission and allows him to walk alone. He

only reaches out to hold Will's shoulder when they reach the outer door, and Will freezes at the touch, his skin blistering under the alien touch.

He doesn't look at Jack as he descends the metal stairs to the waiting ambulance. Doesn't look at anyone, and gets into the back of the vehicle by himself. His brain is foggy; melting with heat. Waves crash in his ears and the pain in his head is a constant thing, alive and wriggling across his skull. His belly is aching and empty, winding tighter and tighter until his spine threatens to snap. Maybe that would be better… Maybe then he could breathe properly…

Where's Hannibal? Where's my Alpha?

It's all he can think about. All he *knows*. As they start to drive, swaying gently with the motion, Will tracks his Alpha's emotions through the broken, weak connection in his mind. Hannibal is worried… He's worried, and Will needs him… They need to be together…

The scene is jarringly similar to Gideon's transfer, and Will can feel his shadow swell. Darkness leeches the sympathy from his brain, lends strength to his muscles and prepares him for what he needs to do.

All I need is one hand free…

He wrenches down on his thumb, dislocating it with a sickening crunch. Pain flares, but Will ignores it, and then it's forgotten in the rush of adrenaline as he launches at the Alpha officer. At the arrogant, stupid *fool* who assumed that an Omega would be pliant and weak and *good*, and didn't tie him down, or even bother to *look* at him until it was too late. Will lunges at him, and slams him back against the metal side of the vehicle, where the Alpha sags, unconscious.

I need to get to Hannibal.

***

As afternoon slips into evening, Hannibal rises to switch on the lamps around his office as Jack and Alana take chairs facing him in across the desk in his office.

'His disarmed his guard; he threw the guard *and* the driver from the vehicle,' Jack says, his voice rough. 'We found the ambulance in an alley in Dumfries.' He shakes his head, a low growl hanging in the air. 'These are not the actions of an innocent man.'

'They're the *actions* of a man who's *impaired*,' Alana insists. She opens her folder and withdraws the drawing of the skewed circle and skittering numbers. 'I had Will draw a clock, to test for cognitive dysfunction.'

She passes it to Hannibal, and the Alpha looks down at it. Drawn today… Will's heat should have resolved this. Apparently not; he will require medical intervention after all. Aloud, he merely says,

‘That is extreme.’ He leans down to his top drawer, withdrawing Will’s file from among his personal effects. ‘Now *this* is the clock he drew for me, two weeks ago.’ He places the faked drawing, done in Will’s own hand under careful guidance from Hannibal during a prodromal episode, side by side with Alana’s. ‘It’s normal.’

‘What progresses gradually but plateaus for length of time?’ Alana asks, frowning down to the side and then up at her mentor. Hannibal shrugs, feigning consideration.

‘Will has periods of clarity,’ he says. ‘We’ve seen him lucid and aware one moment, and then the next he’s not.’

‘Like Prodromal Phasing,’ Alana suggests. ‘Will’s body might be trying to go into heat whether he’s on medication or not.’ She hesitates, unsure if she wants to mention the increased likelihood since Hannibal bonded with Will. Jack still doesn’t know, after all.

‘Yes; it could be a persistent state of rapid but ineffective heat cycles, *especially* since he’s been on suppressants for so long,’ Hannibal says, and Alana nods.

‘It’s hard to diagnose, and even harder to treat… It might not even show up on a brain scan, unless you were looking for it.’

Hannibal glances at her, at how *close* she is to the truth, but he is saved from commenting by Jack’s irritated interruption.

‘Look, just *tell* me if he could kill five people and not be aware of it.’

Omegan Imprinting could explain it, Hannibal thinks, but he won’t give Will such an excuse. It would only delay the inevitable. Alana glances at him, and he at her. They both know that Prodromal Phasing is no cause for psychopathy.

‘This doesn’t *feel* like dementia,’ Jack growls. ‘This is an intelligent psychopath.’ At Alana’s frown, he explains, ‘Look, this killer called the Hobbs’s house. He *warned* Abigail’s father.’

‘I was with Will that entire time,’ Hannibal says, opening his folder again to return the clock drawing to its rightful place.

‘Well, did he have an opportunity to make a phone call?’ Jack asks, and Hannibal purses his lips in thought.

‘Before we went to interview Garrett Jacob Hobbs, he was alone in the office while I was outside loading the car with the files,’ he lies. ‘But that was only for a few minutes.’

Jack scowls, his gaze distant. Then, as his eyes flash red, he snaps his fingers.

‘Dumb luck and bad bookkeeping,’ he says. ‘*That’s* how Will said he caught Hobbs. Now, how would *you* say he caught him?’

Hannibal ignores the way Alana’s eyes widen when she looks at him. Jack, after all, has no way of knowing what a difficult position the other Alpha is putting him in; asking him to

betray his Omega. He frowns, using the movement to simulate consideration for the question. How to explain Will's shadow and dark intuition to someone as… *bland* as Jack Crawford…?

You could never hope to understand my boy.

'We were looking through the files,' he says. 'And it was as if Will plucked his name out of a hat, based on little more than an incomplete address.'

Jack nods.

'Let me play the devil here for a moment, Doctor,' he says, turning to Alana. 'This clock test… Could Will fake something like this? Would he be able to do that?'

My, my, Jack, Hannibal thinks, watching the realization on Alana's face as she processes what he's asking her. *How deep your suspicion truly is.*

And Alana, sweet, innocent Alana, looks at Hannibal for guidance. He says nothing, *gives* her nothing, and her voice cracks in desperation as she replies,

'*Yes*…' She opens her mouth, as if to dispute it, but nothing comes out. She looks horrified, blue eyes flicking from Alpha to Alpha, and the silence lingers. Damning Will.

You see? See how they all turn on you?

Hannibal considers the people across from him, the two so-called friends in his Omega's FBI family.

I am the only one who understand you. The only one who accepts you for who you truly are.

The only one who loves you.

***

Returning from the Animal Control shelter, and Alana has a newfound appreciation for Will's patience when it comes to handling the excited dogs. She gets dragged into the house by Jack and Rudy, the two largest, and Addy, Underbite and Jack yip and whine at her heels. Winston alone is quiet; his tail tucked between his legs.

'Sit! Sit, sit, sit!' She unclips the leashes, but they're too tangled and she's too frazzled to deal with them right now. 'Sit.'

Blowing errant curls from her sweaty face, Alana leaves the dogs to explore their new home. She needs a beer.

She heads into the kitchen and heaves open the refrigerator door. Grabs the nearest beer from the door, unscrews the cap and takes a swig of icy cold bubbles. *Christ…* How did everything get so messed up?

'Alana.'

Will's voice throws her heart into her throat. Alana spins, numb fingers dropping the bottle to smash on the floor, staring at the fugitive Omega in a panic.

'Please don't scream,' Will says, his voice resonating with a thick, Omega tones designed to evoke the Beta's protective nature. Alana visibly stills, a little of the tension draining from her shoulders, but her blue eyes remain wide and glassy with fear.

'I wasn't going to…' she says, watching as the dogs gather around the Omega, licking his hands and exposed ankles, sniffing at the bandage wrapped around his left hand. He must have dislocated his thumb to slip the cuff. 'But you *saying* that sorta makes me think I *should*,' she adds.

Will holds his right hand out, palm up to show her it's empty. He's having a hard time keeping things in focus, and Alana's edges blur in and out, but he can see her face; pale and drawn and closed to him. She doesn't trust him. She doesn't *know* him anymore.

'I'll stand over here, if it'll make you feel safer,' he says, not bothering to hide a hint of the growl in his voice.

'You can't *be* here, Will,' Alana whispers. 'I can't harbor you.'

'I know,' Will replies, drawing closer. He has to move slowly, because the dogs are still pressing against his legs, but he needs to make Alana understand. *Please… She has to understand*… 'I just… got a little confused. Needed to get my bearings.' He looks down at his Alsatian cross, Jack, who hasn't stopped licking his hand and nudging at his injury since seeing him again. 'It's good to see the dogs…' He huffs a tiny laugh, more of a sob caught in his throat than anything, and sinks to a crouch to fuss them all. 'Thought I wasn't gonna see them again.'

'You have to go to a *doctor*,' Alana says, still speaking in a low, distressed tone. Trying to *reason* with him. 'What's happening to you can be *treated*.'

Will ignores her, still fussing Rudy, Jack and Addy. Alana tries again.

'This condition it's… *attacking* the way that you're thinking. But *everything* you're feeling – the confusion, the doubt – it can *all* go away if you *let* it!'

Will sighs, and lets the dogs go as he stands up again.

'If I don't find out who's *doing* this to me,' he says, piercing her with his gold-blue eyes. '*I'll* be going away.' He approaches the counter, his left arm twitching as pain spikes in his right temple. 'They already think I did it… They'll diagnose me something… And they'll *keep* diagnosing me, and they will keep being *wrong*.'

He ends up directly in front of the Beta, and Alana tilts her head to look up at him, her brow creased in a frown and lips pursed. She shakes her head, the fire dimming behind her eyes.

'And I don't know how to help you,' she says quietly, her admission of defeat piercing him. But he has to try… one more time.

‘Alana,’ he whispers, forcing the words past the lump in his throat. ‘I’m *not* a killer.’

Alana hesitates for a moment longer, looking deep into Will’s eyes, and then she fumbles in her coat pocket for her keys.

‘Just take my car,’ she says, pressing the bunch into Will’s palm. ‘It’s parked on the street.’ When he looks down at the keys but makes no move to take them, Alana’s eyes well with tears. ‘*Please*, Will,’ she begs. ‘You *have* to go to a *hospital*.’

Cold sludge and gritty smog fill his lungs. *A lie*. Will takes a step back, processing the betrayal, the *pain* of it, and tries to swallow down the pathetic mewling that wants to bubble up from his shredded chest. He feels raw and exposed; abandoned naked to the wilderness.

‘That was pretty slick, too,’ he manages, his mouth twisting into a bitter smile. ‘You just unlocked your car doors, didn’t you; you flashed the lights.’ He jerks his head towards the front door. ‘They’ll be waiting for me out there.’

Alana stares at him, twin spots of color blooming on her cheeks at being caught. Still, she tries another deception.

‘If there was someone out there, don’t you think they would have already come through the door?’ she asks, but Will shakes his head.

‘No, I don’t, because they know I could kill you before they got up those stairs,’ he says. A dark, twisted part of him *likes* that she flinches at his words. At the threat. *Fine. You want to fear me. I’ll give you something to fear*.

He sets the keys down on the counter, his hand trembling. God… He feels sick. Jack turning on him he can understand; the man’s FBI through and through, he sees only the evidence. But *Alana*… She’s known him since *New Orleans*… Since *Coby*…

He’s really alone in this…

God, Hannibal, please… Please don’t betray me, too…

He makes the decision in a second. If *anyone* is going to help him, it’s his Alpha. He should never have come here. What was he thinking?

Will nods, and strides for the back door.

‘Goodbye, Alana.’

***

Long after Jack and Alana have left his office, Hannibal remains at his desk, waiting for his Omega to come to him. The afternoon wears on, light fading into darkness as his clock ticks away the hours.

Jack calls. Will showed up at Alana’s house, but ran before he could be apprehended. Apparently, he threatened her. Hannibal doubts that.

He tries to read, though his eyes skid over the same four lines of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* again and again. Finally, after what feels like an age, the thick, silent air of the room stirs, and Hannibal smells his mate.

Will's scent is sour with old sweat, and bitter with fear and anger. There is a hint of sweetness; his body reacting to produce slick in his Alpha's presence, but it is muted, and dulled by the emotions raging within him.

Hannibal closes his eyes, savoring the taste of his Omega on his tongue. His skin prickles and he itches to go to his mate, to hold him and comfort him. But he must be patient; Will's mind is at its most fragile. One wrong move and everything they have worked so hard to achieve will shatter.

Hannibal closes the book and turns in his chair, looking up to see the smaller man huddled on his mezzanine gallery. Will's slight body is swamped in the arresting officer's jacket, no doubt worn to ward off the chill and to hide some of his obnoxious orange jumpsuit.

'Hello, Will.' Hannibal's voice is soft and soothing; the same voice he uses when drawing Will out of prodrome. Who knows what state his Omega is in, after all. 'How are you feeling?'

'Self-aware,' Will growls, glaring wetly at the space in front of him. He draws his knees up to his chest and hugs his arms around them, holding his stolen 9mm in his right hand. He's not felt able to put it down since leaving Alana's house.

Hannibal considers his Omega. Considers his mental state; the lack of heat hormones clouding his judgement – for now – but also the intercranial swelling caused by detox and fever… Will doesn't know the truth yet, not all of it, but he is tugging at the veil… He is itching to know. To understand… He suppresses a shiver, his spine tingling with the thrill of Will's becoming.

'You frightened Alana Bloom,' he says, and Will clenches his jaw.

'She's *confused* about who I am,' he whispers. His breath catches, and he gulps back a sob. 'Which I can relate to.' His heart thunders in his chest and he can't bring himself to look down at Hannibal, even though he needs to ask, he needs to know… *Please… Please…* 'Are *you* confused about who I am?'

Please, Alpha… Not you as well… Please… Please don't give up on me…

He might die if Hannibal turns on him, too.

'I'm not confused, I'm skeptical,' Hannibal replies, his gaze steady. 'Meaning I'm willing to change my mind, should the evidence change.'

'Do you believe I killed Abigail?' Will asks, his heart squeezing out an extra beat as he steels himself for the sting.

‘I believe it’s entirely possible,’ Hannibal replies, dark eyes searching Will’s face. His mate refuses to look at him; too afraid of a perceived rejection. ‘If not nearly indisputable,’ he continues, pushing the words deep into Will’s mind. ‘Based on how you discovered her ear.’

Come on, Will… Let yourself go…

Will feels his throat bob around a whimper, but he manages to swallow it down.

‘If it was just Abigail… I would’ve believed…’ His eyes dart from side to side, searching for a way out. For a way to make it all go away. ‘I- I would’ve believed I Imprinted on Hobbs and got so far inside his head I couldn’t get out…’

‘But it wasn’t just Abigail,’ Hannibal says, pride swelling his chest at Will’s *cleverness*. At his ability to question, no matter *how* far into the madness he steps… He has to remind himself that this is a problem, as well; that Will could still be dangerous to him.

Will closes his eyes, pain spiking between his temples and making nausea swell like a wave within him.

‘I *know* who I *am*,’ he whispers, and he finally, *finally* lets himself look at his Alpha.

Hannibal’s eyes flicker red and he smiles, even as he shakes his head.

‘No,’ he murmurs, caressing Will with his loving tone. ‘*All* sense of who you are has been distorted by your illness. You know who you are in this moment.’ He tilts his head. ‘That’s not always the case, Will.’

‘I didn’t kill any of them,’ Will says, gold-ringed eyes bright with clarity. ‘And *somebody* is make sure that *no-one* believes me.’

Hannibal looks down, feigning concern at Will’s paranoia. He thinks quickly, choosing to balance Will’s need for his Alpha’s support with his own desire to convince Will to take responsibility for the killings, and thus his own dark urges.

‘If we’re to prove you didn’t commit these murders,’ he says, rising from the desk to beckon Will down from the library. ‘Perhaps we should consider how you *could* have. And then disprove that.’

Will stares down at him, a flicker of hope sparking a flame in his chest. It’s a start… A big start… It means… Hannibal’s *with* him. Hannibal’s on his side… Will’s chest is a vice, and tears that had only blurred his vision before now trickle down his cheeks.

‘Thank you,’ he whispers. His voice cracks and he sniffs, wiping his face on the coat sleeve as he gets to his feet. ‘Alpha…’

‘Come here, Will.’

Hannibal moves to the ladder, waiting for the other man to descend. As soon as Will is within touching distance, Hannibal sets his hands on his hips, lifting him and turning him as Will climbs down the rungs. He enfolds him in a tight hug, burying Will’s face into the front of his

jacket so that the Omega can absorb his scent. This close, Will stinks of cheap detergent from the jumpsuit, chemicals from the forensics lab and exhaust fumes and of other Alphas, who dared put their bare hands on *his* mate…

Will shudders at the deep growl rumbling in Hannibal's chest. He's not sure his Alpha is even aware of the noise he's making, but he knows what it means, and the knowledge of Hannibal's jealousy melts the block of ice in his belly. He nuzzles even closer, purring softly to soothe his mate, and mouths at the steady pulse in Hannibal's throat.

'Will…' Hannibal draws back when he feels Will's hot lips on his neck. As much as he wants to bare his mate's flesh, to sink his teeth into his skin and mark him, inside and out, as *his*, as *claimed*, they only have so much time. He cannot resist a kiss, though, and holds each side of Will's face as he devours his Omega's mouth.

Will moans into the embrace, arms wrapped tight around Hannibal's slim waist as he parts his lips and sucks Hannibal's tongue down. *God*… He'll never get enough of this… He could die like this, right now…

But then Hannibal ends the embrace, and the distance is like a slap. Will flinches, his skin stinging in the cold air, and he doesn't even try to stop the whimper of fear.

'It's alright, beloved,' Hannibal whispers, stroking Will's jaw. 'Give me your coat.'

Will hesitates, his eyes dropping to the firearm in his shaking hand. Hannibal doesn't question his loyalty, just holds out his hand. Because they both know that Will is going to give it to him… And he does; he sighs, and drops it onto Hannibal's palm before shrugging out of the damp coat.

'You need a drink,' Hannibal says, placing the gun and folded coat on his desk. He pours Will a large glass of water, and only when his Omega has emptied the glass does he allow him to take his usual armchair. Hannibal sits across from him, one long leg crossed over the other, hands clasped in his lap. His expression is open, curious; just like any other session. He wants to give Will this sense of stability; of normalcy, to draw him towards the version of the truth he needs.

'If you are this killer,' Hannibal says, tracking the minute changes in Will's body language as his Omega relaxes into the session. Open legs, hands resting lightly on the armrests, shoulders low and throat bared. 'That identity runs through these events like a thread through pearls. Cassie Boyle would have been your first victim.'

His shadow licks at his ear, whispering to him from the other side of the office, and Will turns his head to see what it wants to show him. The world drags behind, too slow through the honey-thick current spilling from his veins.

'You said the crime scene was practically gift-wrapped.' Hannibal's voice drifts through him, *within* him, and Will flows on the current rising within him. He gets to his feet, moving closer to the offering. A jet black replica of the field kabuki; Cassie's body, impaled on the stag's head. Draped on razor tips, head flung back in a parody of ecstasy… Lungs missing; ripped right out of her while she was still alive…

‘It told me *everything* I needed to know to catch Garrett Jacob Hobbs,’ he says.

‘You had seen one of Hobbs’s victims,’ Hannibal says, still seated behind him. ‘You knew how he killed… You may have been exploring how he killed to better understand who he was.’

Will shakes his head, a sharp flick at the fly buzzing in the back of his skull.

‘I wasn’t *in* Minnesota when Cassie Boyle was murdered,’ he whispers. But Hannibal is not to be dissuaded.

‘She disappeared on a Saturday,’ he says. ‘She was found on a Monday. You would have had the weekend to do your work.’

Death stares at him. Filmy white eyes, blank and soulless… A wendigo, carved from the same jet black leather skin of his replica…

I know you…

Sweat beads on Will’s forehead and cheeks. His eyes pulse and itch; he can feel them flood gold as heat chases ice up his spine. His crest aches like he’s been freshly bitten and his muscles cramp when he tries to clench around nothing.

‘I *know* I didn’t kill her.’

‘How do you know?’ Hannibal asks, and doubt flickers in Will’s mind. He… he *didn’t*… Did he?

Sensing his advantage, seeing the crack in Will’s certainty, Hannibal presses on.

‘What did you think, when you first met Marissa Schurr? How much like Abigail she was?’

Claws tickle his scalp, scraping through his hair to tug on the curls. A dominant grip; an Alpha’s grip, forcing him to turn his head. To *see*. To see the jet-black replica of the impaled girl, mounted in only her briefs on the antlers hanging from Hannibal’s blood-red wall.

Hannibal’s voice caresses him, slithering inside his ear and coating his brain with confusion.

‘Same height, same weight, hair color… Same age.’

‘*How* could I resist?’ Will purrs, the shadow of Garrett Jacob Hobbs, his first Alpha, swelling within him. *God*…. He’s slick at the very *idea* of Hobbs stroking him, and getting hard as he imagines the man’s scent in his nose, his beard against his lips…

‘So much like his daughter,’ Hannibal says, dipping his voice lower. A lover’s caress. ‘You may have wondered why Garrett Jacob Hobbs didn’t kill her himself.’

Yes…

‘Dr Sutcliffe wasn’t killed how Garrett Jacob Hobbs killed,’ Hannibal continues, and Will’s attention moves to the tan leather chair behind the desk. Sutcliffe’s body, gleaming obsidian in the lamplight, is untarnished in his memory. No gaping face, no broken jaw to terrorize him. Just a middle-aged man who could be sleeping in this tableaux.

‘He was murdered,’ Hannibal says, adding a sense of urgency now. Of pressure. Just the right amount to make Will break… ‘How you imagined yourself murdering a woman only days before.’

‘How Georgia Madchen killed,’ Will agrees. ‘She dreamt she saw me killing Sutcliffe,’ he admits, and he drops to a whisper as he adds, ‘But she couldn’t see my face… And then she was murdered.’

When he speaks, Hannibal cannot contain the growling purr adding a rasp to his voice. He can feel the itch behind his eyes, warning him that his irises have turned red, but no matter now. Will cannot see him.

‘You catch these killers by getting into their heads,’ he says. ‘But you also allow them into your own.’

Will stares at him. Stares at his Alpha; his bonded mate, his lover, and Hannibal stares back at him, now sitting behind his desk, his hands clasped in front of him, an expression of careful concern on his face and gleaming, obsidian eyes boring into his soul.

‘I’m trying to help you, Will.’

The wendigo is behind Hannibal; his shadow. Wicked antlers rising from his skull, so that, for just a second, it seems they are one person, and the crown of antlers rises from *Hannibal’s* head…

Will comes back to himself with a shuddering gasp. They are still in their armchairs, and Hannibal is sitting across from him, that same pensive expression on his face. Will can feel the clamminess of his skin; the sweat dribbling between his shoulder blades and under his arms. He doesn’t care. He doesn’t care about anything but the truth.

‘Then take me to Minnesota,’ he whispers, opening gold-filled eyes and staring straight into his Alpha’s face. It all started in Minnesota… It’s going to *end* in Minnesota. ‘I want to see where Abigail died.’

Hannibal considers him for a moment. Considers the determination on Will’s face; the set of his jaw and defiant tilt of his chin. But there is also something heartbreakingly vulnerable in the way that his mate is asking. He *needs* this. He *needs* Hannibal to come with him, to help him understand. And there is nothing, after all, that Hannibal will not do for him.

‘We’ll have to drive,’ he says, and Will nods.

‘I thought as much.’

‘I’ll pack us a change of clothes,’ Hannibal says, and he rises from the chair, smoothing down his suit jacket as he stands. ‘Get your coat, Will. We should leave now; no doubt good Uncle Jack has sent federal agents to my house, to watch over me. When they realize I am not there, they will come here to look for me. With any luck, we can continue to avoid them.’

‘You told them you were going home?’ Will asks, shrugging into the oversized jacket. He hesitates for a moment, and then slips the gun into the pocket. He doesn’t need it with Hannibal. ‘Why?’

‘Because I knew you would come here,’ Hannibal replies, striding to the closet to fetch his own woolen coat and scarf. ‘And I wanted to be alone with you.’

‘Weren’t you afraid I’d hurt you?’ Will asks, nuzzling closer when Hannibal waits for him at the door door. ‘After what happened with Alana?’

Hannibal dips his head to scent Will’s hair, and then places a tender kiss on his Omega’s feverish forehead before leaning around him to open the door out to the waiting room.

‘You could never hurt me, Will,’ he murmurs, and he settles his hand on the small of Will’s back as he guides him down to the Bentley parked outside. ‘It’s not in your nature.’

‘Maybe my nature is changing,’ Will says quietly, but he reaches down and, even though it’s painful to do so, uses his left hand to squeeze Hannibal’s fingers. ‘I feel like I’m changing.’

‘And so you are,’ Hannibal agrees, his tone warm with pride. ‘You are evolving, Will.’

‘Feel like I’m *de*volving,’ Will mutters. He sinks into the passenger seat and breathes in the smell of leather, beeswax and engine oil. Hannibal’s scent is etched deep into the fabric of his seat, and it rises in a gentle puff of air when the other man sits behind the wheel. Will can feel himself relaxing, sinking lower in the chair as he drifts on a current of cedarwood and spiced musk, thick and warm and *safe*. Hannibal is here… His Alpha is here, and everything is going to be alright…

Hannibal allows the silence to grow between them, and watches Will drift off to the patter of rain on the windshield, lulled to sleep by the swish of wipers before they even reach the townhouse. He parks down the road and scopes the area for FBI agents, hurrying inside to pack an overnight back for them both when the coast is clear.

When he returns, Hannibal makes sure to switch off his cell phone, lest Jack Crawford trace the signal. He doubts anyone will think to monitor him that closely but, he reasons, one can never be too careful when travelling in the company of a wanted criminal. He has no intention of being interrupted before Will accepts the truth about himself.

With Will deeply asleep beside him, Hannibal drives until his own eyes itch with tiredness. At a little past 1am, he pulls off the interstate into the parking lot of a motel in Granger. Will wakes with a jerk at the touch on his shoulder, his frantic eyes swinging in wild directions before settling on his Alpha’s face.

‘Hannibal… Wha-…? Where are we?’ he mumbles, his voice thick and dazed. Hannibal smiles gently, stroking errant curls back from his face.

‘Illinois,’ he replies. ‘We need to rest, in a proper bed, before we continue our journey.’

Will hesitates, but Hannibal continues to smile, and pet him, and he relents.

‘I’ll wait here, if you get us a room?’ he suggests, and sighs with relief when Hannibal nods. He still flinches at the bang of the car door shutting when the other man leaves, and dips as low as possible in the seat to avoid any security cameras. In a place like this, not dissimilar to the motel chosen by Angel Maker, he doubts any cameras are working, if they exist at all, but he doesn’t want to risk it.

Hannibal returns a few minutes later and takes their bag from the trunk. He beckons Will from the car, and Will swallows back his nerves before hurrying into the room just ahead of him. His chest only loosens enough for his heart to beat again once Hannibal has shut and bolted the door, and he can’t help but twitch the net curtains aside, just to check that the parking lot really *is* deserted.

‘Relax, Will.’ Hannibal sets the key down on the small desk beneath the window and switches on a lamp, bathing the room in a yellow glow, before shrugging out of his coat. ‘You’re safe here. With me.’

‘One of us should keep watch,’ Will mutters, hugging his elbows, searching every creeping shadow for danger. ‘I’ll stay awake; you’re driving.’

‘We’ll *both* sleep,’ Hannibal says firmly. His expression softens and he draws closer, cupping Will’s face and pressing their foreheads together. ‘It’s alright; I promise. Come; let me care for you.’

‘I can sort myself out,’ Will says, giving a moody shrug to dislodge Hannibal. But his Alpha is insistent, and Will doesn’t really want to argue. He feels strong hands peel his jacket away from his shoulders, and fights just enough to get the gun from the pocket before allowing Hannibal to fold the coat up and set it on the floor. He drops the gun onto the bed, and toes off the ratty sneakers, leaving him barefoot. Finally, Hannibal lifts his hands to rip open the poppers of the hideous orange jumpsuit. It scratches Will’s blotchy, chafed skin as it comes away, baring cheap cotton boxers, damp with slick and bunched unbecomingly between his red raw thighs. Hannibal growls when he sees the damage to his mate’s body, and he brushes soft lips across the red patches he exposes on Will’s shoulders and collarbone.

Will closes his eyes, shivering at the reverent, soothing touch. His belly is an inferno, raging with an endless need to consume and be filled, spreading tendrils of fire out through his limbs until he’s sure he’ll burst from the hot pressure inside him.

‘*Hannibal*…’

‘Sssh…’ Hannibal rasps his tongue over the bumps on Will’s ribs, and then swirls a wet pattern over his Omega’s stomach, spearing and lapping his navel until Will whimpers. The

smaller man's hips buck involuntarily, and Will's slim hands come up to card through Hannibal's silky hair when the Alpha kneels before him.

'I don't… Hannibal… We *shouldn't*…' Will can't finish a thought, let alone a sentence, and he can feel his brain boiling inside his skull. He tips his head back, groaning when Hannibal nuzzles the thick nest of dark hair above his growing hardness. He can feel the vibrations of Hannibal's low purrs and he twitches, his breath catching in his throat when the tongue licks healing stripes up his inner thighs.

Hannibal coats Will's skin with a glistening sheen of saliva, promoting his Omega's healing and scent-marking him as claimed. He can feel Will's day-old musk settle on his face, rich and tangy, not altogether unpleasant. Sitting back on his heels, he breaks free of the trembling hands in his hair and looks up at his Omega, his mate, his prize…

'My beautiful boy,' he whispers, earning a breathy whimper from Will. The sugary, smoky smell of slick is growing stronger, and Hannibal hums to himself as he massages Will's firm buttocks, bringing the Omega stumbling a step closer so that he can press his throat against the smaller man's erection and purr directly against the swollen flesh.

'Ah-!' Will breaks off, huffing a laugh when he realizes what Hannibal's doing. He squirms, trying not to rub against the Alpha's stubble but oddly aroused by the idea of grinding against Hannibal's *throat*. And then a long, slender finger slides down between his ass cheeks and his body gushes hot slick at the mere *idea* of that digit pushing inside him, and Hannibal's purring groan vibrates through his throbbing cock, right back to his tender balls, and it's *good*. Good enough to make him whine, to make him shift and try to spread his legs so that Hannibal can enter him more easily… Good enough to make him forget, for a moment, why they're doing this in a dingy motel in the middle of the night on their way to Minnesota. '*Hannibal…'*

'That's it,' Hannibal whispers, pressing the flat of his finger against the blisteringly hot ring of muscle, feeling Omega slick slide down his finger and gather in the palm of his hand. 'Relax for me, Will. Give yourself to me.'

'I *have*,' Will whimpers, his hands clenching into shaking fists at his sides. He breathes in through his nose, counting to three, and wills his body to loosen. He feels the moment it does; a flutter of muscles contracting and then parting, and Hannibal plunges knuckle-deep into the vice-like channel of his body. Will gulps, bearing down, rolling his pelvis in a futile attempt to suck the Alpha in deeper. To pull him up to the part of his body designed to stretch around a knot…

'Easy, Will…' Hannibal has no intention of rushing. His left arm is wrapped around Will's hip, forefinger held tight inside him. With his right hand, Hannibal begins to stroke and play with Will's erection; he takes it firmly by the base, squeezing just hard enough to make Will's stomach tense before loosely pumping up and down. He inspects the remaining patches of irritated skin and dips his head to lick the parts he can reach, sucking blooms of red into the creamy skin across Will's abdomen between licks.

God… Will's eyelids flutter, and he can hear the breathy little moans and sounds he's making as Hannibal toys with him. The Alpha's movements are languid, designed to build the

sensation at an increasingly intense pace, just slow enough that he feels crazy with frustration. He doesn't know whether to rock forwards into the stroking hand or roll down into the finger fucking his ass, and he gasps when Hannibal makes the decision more difficult by adding a second finger to his slick-drenched hole. The other man bends his knuckles, crooking his fingers to catch his prostate, and Will releases a slow, shaking breath at the different kind of pleasure. It's a deep sensation, not sharp like his cock, but something richer, promising endless heights if it can just be stimulated enough…

'Please don't stop,' he whispers, grabbing for Hannibal's shoulders as his Alpha kneels up to lick and suckle on a nipple. 'Hannibal… Please…'

Hannibal grins to himself, nipping at the pink bud on Will's hard chest. He plays with the beads of moisture glistening at the tip of Will's erection, tapping the slit and tickling oh-so-gently around the skin pulled back from the head. The mix of sensations are a suitable distraction from Will's worry, and he can see his Omega losing himself to prodrome as the pleasure climbs.

Heat floods Will's body, rising from him in waves. His scent turns sugary and a map of blue veins darken beneath the flushed surface of his skin. Hannibal's third finger is swallowed as soon as it presses for entry, and he rubs against *every* silky smooth surface inside Will's body before massaging circles into the wrinkled flesh of the little gland, dragging out the torture for as long as he can.

'*Fuck… Hannibal… God…'* Will's gold eyes open wide and he stares down, sightless, at his mate. Sweat trickles between his shoulder-blades and dampens his hair, making the curls stick to his forehead. His cheeks are bright red, his lips swollen, and the air ripples before his mouth with every stuttering breath.

Hannibal has rarely seen something so beautiful.

'That's my boy,' he croons, and Will judders at the praise. Hannibal dips his head, making a show of inhaling the smell of Will's arousal as his right hand continues to pump him in long, rough strokes. Will bucks, groaning and digging his nails into the silk wool of Hannibal's suit as he tries to roll back and thrust forwards at the same time. 'What does that feel like?' Hannibal purrs, and Will keens.

'Good,' he whispers, trapped by the alternating movements. '*God…* So, *so* good…'

'Show me,' Hannibal growls, twisting his fingers inside and tightening his hand on Will's erection, rubbing him jarringly hard and fast. Will chokes, pleasure winding tight like a coil inside him and then bursting, shattering him with a sudden, vicious orgasm. He staggers, his knees buckling as white light crashes behind his eyes and heat incinerates his organs, shooting boiling seed all over Hannibal's hand and up his own belly. His insides pulse and pull, over and over and over as he tries to coax a knot from three fingers, and his mind screams with one single truth; he needs to mate. To breed.

'*Fuck!'* He gasps for breath, waiting for the comedown. But Hannibal is still touching him, his fingers still moving inside his twitching, throbbing ass, and all he can think is *more*. He needs *more*.

Will's snarl rips the air between them, shocking Hannibal's heart to skip a beat. It's a feral sound, desperate and determined, and he jerks when Will twists a fist into his hair, using the punishing grip to haul him to his free. He pulls his fingers free of the other man's body and placed his wet hand on Will's quivering flank, obeying the frantic tugging and claiming Will's mouth in a bruising kiss. Clumsy hands claw at his waistcoat and shirt buttons, and Hannibal chuckles at Will's inability to control his fine motor functions, lost to heat as he is.

'Fuck me,' the Omega growls, his voice so compressed by his swollen scent glands and thick with hormones that it barely sounds like words. Hannibal purrs, tangling his fingers in Will's curls and using his grip to force him to bare his throat.

Will goes willingly, arching his spine and displaying himself for his Alpha. He whimpers, cupping the bulge in Hannibal's suit trousers and rubbing, trying to draw him closer and entice him to mount him.

'Please,' he breathes, pressing the words into Hannibal's wet lips between hungry kisses. '*Please*, Hannibal; please fuck me.'

'Lie down for me, Will.' Hannibal undoes his tie and tugs it free of his shirt collar, his eyes glittering like rubies as he watches his Omega crawl onto the bed, facing away from him.

Will bows his head, pressing his forehead to the cheap-detergent smelling covers. He sinks his chest to the mattress, his ass in the air, legs spread, and knees tucked up to expose himself. His heart thunders, filling his brain with shocking images of how debauched and *Omegan* he must look; desperate to be fucked, to be mounted and mated and bred. A hole to be filled and a belly to cradle a child… But he doesn't care. He doesn't; he just wants Hannibal inside him, *now*, no matter what.

'You're *mine*, Will.' Hannibal's voice is low, rough with a rutting growl, and he doesn't miss the shiver it elicits from the Omega. He removes his clothes with quick precision, folding the items onto the chair near the dresser. Steps out of his shoes and balls up his socks and boxers. No reason to make a mess, not when there is a perfectly good body to destroy right there.

'I'm yours,' Will promises. He flinches and whimpers when Hannibal places a hot, firm hand on the base of his spine, mewling like an animal as he tries to push up into the touch. Hannibal's velvety purrs fill the room and Will's softer, higher purrs harmonize perfectly, rising and falling with every breath.

Hannibal is hard and aching, heavy and dripping as their mingled scents swirl between their hot bodies. He kneels on the bed behind Will and spreads his buttocks apart, exposing the pink, puckered ring. Slick beads on the silky surface of the skin and Hannibal grins as he lowers his mouth to kiss and lick the tender flesh. Will tastes like smoked honey and copper, musky and rich and *owned*, and Hannibal groans to himself as he laps at the syrup.

'Oh… oh my *God*…' Will squeezes his eyes tight shut but tears still fall, and he has to swallow quickly to keep from drooling. Hannibal's tongue repeats the same movements with his ass as it did with his navel, spearing *inside* and lapping his wetness like it's the most delicious thing he's ever tasted. He's so sensitive back there that he can feel every coarse brush of the Alpha's tongue, every kiss, every hint of teeth between wet ass cheeks. He's rock

hard again already, the head of his cock bobbing against his quivering stomach as he twitches and jerks, trying to hold still but betrayed by excited muscles.

‘You taste divine,’ Hannibal murmurs, pressing a final, damp kiss to the very base of Will’s spine. He gathers up a palmful of slick and, gritting his teeth against the sudden flare of hot pleasure, smears it up and down his own throbbing hardness. The tingling heat shoots from the tip of his length to the deepest part of him and his darkness swarms around it, giving him strength and stamina. He readies himself, holding firmly and pressing the head of his erection to the drenched entrance. A moment of resistance, barely a heartbeat, and then he is sinking inside, from tip to root, in one long, hard thrust.

Will cries out, tensing at the sudden invasion and sharp stretch, and feels Hannibal dig his fingers into his hips to keep him still. He’ll have a belt of bruises come morning, but he doesn’t care. He groans when Hannibal rocks back, flesh dragging against flesh, and tightens in a desperate attempt to keep hold of him. And then Hannibal pushes back in, all the way until his pelvis is flush with the backs of Will’s thighs and their balls slap together, and the rub against his swollen prostate is *so*, so good, making pleasure crackle like lightning over his skin.

‘Fuck!’

Hannibal grins at Will’s obscenity, his sandy hair falling over his forehead with the force of his movement. He drags his mate as far back as he can, impaling him on his length over and over, stabbing him in the only way he can without killing him. Bloodlust turns his vision red and everything becomes sharper, humming with power, with *life*, pulsing in time to his beating heart. The room flickers in and out of focus and he can smell their scents, thick and sweet, heavy and light; a perfect blend of Alpha and Omega. He sees the blood roar beneath Will’s skin, flowing from his heart to warm the cave of his abdomen; a perfect cradle for life, and the sight draws a deep, rumbling purr from the well of his chest.

Will’s breath catches when he hears Hannibal’s purr. He shudders at what it means, at his mate’s satisfaction with him as a breeding partner, and drops his head even lower, tipping his hips to *exactly* the right angle. A distant part of him wonders why he’s bothering; he’s been taking heat suppressants for so long now that surely he’s barren, but the heat-mad rest of his brain and body scream at him to present, to bare, to pull it all in until there’s a child in his belly.

‘*Hannibal*…’

Will’s cracked, desperate voice grabs Hannibal’s heart in a fist and stops it from beating. He staggers and falls forward, shoving Will flat onto the mattress as he ruts with dark and terrible fury. Muscles bulge in his arms and across his shoulders as he pounds into the willing body beneath him, and his growls are swallowed by the damp skin of Will’s neck.

‘Come for me,’ Hannibal rasps, chasing his own spiraling pleasure. He feels the inferno erupt in his pelvis, crashing out in waves of blinding bliss, every muscle locking rigid and spasming in ever tighter contractions as he pours his seed deep inside Will’s body. He strikes, sinking his teeth into the crimson ridges of Will’s crest, spilling blood over burning skin to steam in the air, and bites down, hard.

Will keens, screwing his eyes tight shut as another orgasm rips him apart. He can feel himself bucking and jerking under Hannibal, his insides coated with his Alpha's release. Hannibal's sharp teeth penetrate his crest, jaw snapped shut like a trap to keep him in place as they ride the waves of hot pleasure together. It's good; it's so right, and pure… He's floating in light, nothing but air, bone-deep happiness melting him beneath the comforting weight of the other man.

Hannibal's purrs are muffled by the throbbing crest still between his teeth. He licks the bite mark clean, his saliva healing the cruel tears and cleaning up every drop of blood from his Omega. He can hear Will's softer purrs and satisfied murmurs beneath him; the smaller man is drifting in and out of sleep, his body wrecked by the rapid heat cycles. Hannibal loosens his jaw and releases the tender flesh, pressing one last kiss to the bruised and swollen bitemark before rolling onto his side and pulling Will to lie with him. They curl up, Will's back to Hannibal's chest, still sealed together by the Alpha's knot, a tangle of legs and arms on top of the covers.

'Sleep,' Hannibal whispers, stroking over Will's swollen, bandaged left thumb. 'You're safe.'

Will mumbles something indistinct and snuggles down into Hannibal's embrace, his skin gleaming with a light coat of sweat. If he remains as hot as he has been, Hannibal won't need the blankets. He frowns, allowing his worry to show on his face now that his mate cannot see. Will's continued intermittent heats are dangerous; he had hoped that the chase would trigger a long enough heat to be done with this, but Will's body, it seems, requires medical intervention.

As soon as we're done in Minnesota, he thinks, tracing the sharp line of Will's bearded jaw. *I'm taking you back to the hospital.*

He can tell, from the smell of him, that the damage is not a true threat to his life, but the bitter, burned caramel aftertaste to his scent is getting stronger. Another day won't kill him… *Though two might…*

Hannibal squashes the flare of guilt. Will may have lasting damage from the rapid detox and misfiring heats, may have scarring on his brain as a result of the swelling, but it is a price Hannibal is willing to pay for the chance to free his mate and help him think more clearly.

He curls around Will, shielding him from the world and any harm it might do him, reverently stroking his curls back from a flushed and pain-tight face.

'No one can be fully aware of another being unless we love them,' he whispers, slipping the words, the promise, deep inside his mate's sleeping psyche. 'By that love, we see potential in our beloved. Through that love, we allow our beloved to see their potential.' He brushes his lips over Will's cheek; a chaste kiss, to seal his oath. 'Expressing that love, our beloved's potential comes true.' Another kiss, rumbling with a purr in the back of his throat. 'I love you, *mylimasis*.'

And I will always do what's best for you.

***

Jack Crawford knows when something is wrong. Hannibal Lecter is not a man to ignore the FBI agents posted outside his house and office, not when they make repeated attempts to contact him. He wouldn't be ignoring his phone calls and text messages from Jack, and from Dr Bloom.

He drives with Alana to Dr Bedelia Du Maurier's house. A last resort, and a slim chance, but he still holds a faint flicker of hope when the blonde Alpha opens the door and welcomes them inside that Hannibal will be here, mildly irritated at the interruption and trying not to show it.

'Have you had any contact with Hannibal Lecter in the last twenty-four hours?' he asks, striding into her consulting room. Stronger than the scent of flowers and expensive perfume is the bitterness of worry; Alana stinks of it, and her face is pinched as wet eyes flick from Alpha to Alpha.

'He didn't make his session this morning,' Bedelia replies, crossing her arms and frowning at Jack. 'And he didn't call in; which he would consider rude. Is something wrong?'

Jack and Alana exchanges worried looks, and Jack's sigh tapers into a growl.

'I'm on my way to Minnesota,' he says. 'I believe that Will Graham has *taken* Hannibal Lecter to Minnesota.'

Bedelia raises one eyebrow in curiosity, and Alana explains,

'Will thinks he's being *framed* for these murders. He's slipping in and out of prodromal delusion.' Her breath catches, and she shivers. 'He could kill Hannibal and not even know he's doing it.'

'If anyone could've helped Mister Graham, it would've been Hannibal,' Bedelia says. She pauses, and then adds, 'In fact… He may *still* be trying.'

Against my advice… What are you playing at, Hannibal?

***

It's a bright day when they arrive at the Hobbs's house in Bloomington, Minnesota. Hannibal parks the Bentley near the steps and Will gets out into crisp, winter air. The season has moved on; where golden autumn leaves once covered the ground now lies snow; untarnished and glowing white in the weak sun.

He moves alone, entering the house by himself. Doesn't know how he gets from the front door to the kitchen door, but suddenly he's there. He's there and he *sees*.

The phone rings. It's the morning he found Hobbs's resignation letter. Abigail, her mom and Garrett are in the kitchen, making breakfast.

Abigail answers the phone. *My sweet girl*. She's wearing the same dusky pink and lilac sweater… Her hair catches the sun and shines like fire.

‘Hello?’ She frowns at the receiver, and turns. ‘Dad? It’s for you.’

Will turns from the waffle stove. He’s still holding the skillet, and he moves with too-careful precision. This is a dream. He knows it’s a dream, but it feels so *real*…

An Imprinted memory… Not my memory… Hobbs’s…

Do you see?

‘Caller ID said it was blocked,’ Abigail says, handing him the phone. Will’s heart trips in his chest, but the thump he can hear is slow and steady; a drumbeat bringing him ever closer to the truth.

I have the answers you seek…

Sweat sticks small curls to his forehead and his fingers feel numb when he lifts it to his ear.

‘Hello?’

‘Will?’

It’s *Hannibal’s* voice, low and smooth in his ear. But he doesn’t know this man, this stranger, and he feels a zing of fear up his spine.

‘Yes?’

‘*Will?* We’re here.’

Will wakes slowly, struggling to pull himself from the dream. His head hurts, and his skin stings with a thousand invisible razor cuts. Something very bad happened here; the violence and betrayal soaks the air around the house. What will it feel like when he gets inside?

They get out of the car, and Will tears the yellow crime scene tape from the patio doors. He’s glad Hannibal brought him a change of clothes; these are softer and more comfortable against his tender skin, though he still moves gingerly, every nerve on fire. He can sense Hannibal’s trepidation; his Alpha is alert, his scent sharp with what must be worry. *Unless you’re excited about something…?*

Yanking open the door, stiff on rusted sliders, Will leads the way into the lounge. Pauses at the resonances hanging in the air like forgotten streamers on the gym hall floor after prom.

Abigail’s voice; sharp with grief and pushing. Pushing because she knew…

‘Are we gonna re-enact the crime? You be my dad. You be my mom. And –’ *She’d looked at Hannibal, and the Alpha had gone very still.* ‘You be the man on the phone.’

No… Please, no…

Will can’t stop himself. Can’t stop his head from turning, even though his glands are so swollen it *hurts* to move.

‘Are we gonna re-enact the crime?’ he asks quietly, echoing their daughter’s words. *Our daughter… Born in blood…*

‘If that would help you,’ Hannibal replies, his face schooled to careful neutrality. *Oh, Will… You really are too clever for your own good…*

His Omega doesn’t *want* to believe it; Will moves away before he sees too much. He’s in pain; his brain is on fire and every step hurts him. He doesn’t know what to think; what to trust. His instincts beg him to obey Hannibal, but what’s left of his mind cannot help but see the pieces of the puzzle and understand the whole…

Stop now, Will. You may not like what you find.

Will leads them upstairs, to the kitchen overlooking the front yard. Oak cabinets and a cream floor… A garish splash of dried blood where Abigail died, rusty brown and black in the darkness…

Hannibal inspects the room, coolly calculating. Will allows him to step to the side, his skin prickling as he stares around at the spatters and smears from what must have been a struggle.

‘It’s as if Abigail was supposed to die in this kitchen,’ Hannibal murmurs, the words jolting sense into Will’s internal catalogue of wounds.

‘Her throat was cut,’ he says. ‘She lost great gouts of blood…’ His voice trembles, and he has to pause, swallow, before continuing, pointing as he does. ‘There’s an unmistakable arterial spray…’

‘They haven’t found her body,’ Hannibal mentions, eyes still locked on the scene.

‘Just the one piece,’ Will replies, backing up and then forcing himself to take a step forwards again when he realizes what he’s doing. Fighting with his instinct to flee, to hide…

‘If you were in Garrett Jacob Hobbs’s frame of mind when you killed her,’ Hannibal says, repressing the itch behind his eyes so that his irises don’t flare red. ‘They may never find her.’

‘’Cos I honored every part of her?’ Will mutters, golden eyes glowing in the shadows, locked on the bloodstain.

Hannibal turns to him.

‘Perhaps you didn’t come here looking for a killer,’ he says softly. ‘Perhaps you came here to find yourself.’ Will frowns at him, and Hannibal explains, ‘You killed a man in this very room.’

See…?

Will’s head swivels of its own accord, and he stares into the corner of the room where Hobbs lay dying, riddled with bullets, eyes red as rubies in a waxy, sunken face…

‘I stared at Hobbs,’ he whispers, stroked and soothed by his unfurling shadow. ‘And the *space* opposite me assumed the shape of a man filled with dark and swarming flies…’

His darkness merged with my darkness… My Alpha… My first…

He huffs, ducks his head and bites his lip, blushing at the betrayal to his current Alpha.

‘And then I scattered them,’ he mumbles, glancing up from under furrowed brows, worried about Hannibal’s reaction.

Hannibal considers this confession. Considers Will’s ability to see the monster inside the first Alpha with whom he Imprinted. *What do you see inside me, beloved?* A part of his heart aches to find out.

‘At a time when other men fear their isolation, yours has become understandable to you.’

He prowls around Will, subtly moving to block off the escape route. *Now… now…* The mask is slipping. He can feel Will’s presence, scrabbling at the doors to his mind palace. His Omega is strong, and they have a profound connection… Will can be denied no longer.

Leaning down over the smaller man’s shoulder, Hannibal drops his voice in a gesture of intimacy.

‘You are alone,’ he purrs, his breath ghosting across the nape of Will’s neck. ‘Because you are *unique*.’

A killer. A monster inside the flesh of a man. Just like me.

‘I’m as alone as you are,’ Will replies, and Hannibal’s eyes flicker red, excitement making his heart trip double time. His voice, when he speaks, thrums with fervor.

‘If you followed the urges you kept down for so long, *cultivated* them as the inspirations they are… You would have become someone other than yourself.’

You would have become me… Your Alpha… Believe it, Will… It’s possible…

Will closes his eyes, blocking out the Alpha’s sibilant voice, denying the lie. He can’t hear this. Not from Hannibal. He can’t accept something that jars with every fiber of his being.

‘I *know* who I *am*,’ he whispers, feeling sick… And, with a jolt, he realizes that Hannibal is tired, and his manipulation is clumsy. The cracks are showing… His control is not complete.

But it’s normally so perfect… So seamless… I never knew…

Oh my God…

Will turns, fear choking him until his voice wobbles when he tries to push words past the hot lump in his throat.

‘I’m not so sure I know who *you* are anymore…’ He keeps turning, one hand reaching into his coat pocket for the gun, ignoring every instinct screaming for him to get on his knees and submit. ‘But I am *certain* one of us killed Abigail.’

And it wasn’t me…

‘Whoever that was, killed the others,’ Hannibal says, his tone light; a gentle reminder to his Omega of his power. He blinks, a show of surprise when Will raises the gun and aims it at his face. His mate’s grip is steady, but he is fighting muscle spasms. Hannibal is curious at his own flicker of fear – he cannot entirely predict what Will is going to do. *Interesting…*

He moves slowly, trying to close the distance without spooking the other man; approaching in the way one might attempt to capture a wild animal.

‘Are you a killer, Will?’ he asks, trying to pull him back from the darkness. Will has pried off the mask, but he isn’t ready; Hannibal can see it in his eyes. The panic and the hurt. He can still save him from it. Still guide him and protect him. ‘You. Right now. This man standing in front of me. Is this who you really are?’

‘I am who I’ve *always* been,’ Will growls, gold eyes flashing with anger.

How could I have been so blind? So stupid? All this time… After everything I gave to you? Please… please, Alpha, tell me it isn’t true…

But Hannibal isn’t denying it; he isn’t fighting… He just doesn’t want his brains blown out.

‘The scales have just fallen from my eyes,’ Will breathes, and his chest rips, a chasm opening beneath his heart as his stomach twists. He’s dying; hollowed out and consumed. Hannibal has taken *everything* from him. *‘I can see you now…’*

A tear slips down his cheek and, to his horror, Will feels his lower lip tremble. A whimper claws at his mouth, begging to escape, and he fights it down, trying to drown it in the shadow crashing through him.

‘What do you see?’ Hannibal asks, his own eyes wet at the grief he sees and feels within his mate. Will thinks he betrayed him.

No, my love… I did this for you. To make you strong.

‘You called here that morning,’ Will says, pages turning like a storybook in his mind, his shadow forming words like ink on paper. He’s starting to shake; he can feel it, but he can’t stop. Sweat trickles down his forehead and soaks his clothes.

Not now… Please, not now…

‘Abigail knew,’ he gasps. ‘And you kept her secrets until…’ He can’t breathe; panic crushes his lungs. The air is too thin, and every breath feels like fire. ‘Until what? Until sh-she found out some of *yours?*’

Hannibal tilts his head, obsidian eyes, *stag* eyes, watching him. Calculating.

Let me back in, Will… It's alright…

'You said it felt good to kill Garrett Jacob Hobbs,' he says, allowing his brow to crease. 'Would it feel good to kill me now?'

'Garrett Jacob Hobbs was a murderer,' Will snaps, the gun swaying as his shaking gets worse. 'Ar-are you a *murderer*, Dr Lecter?'

'What reason would I have?' Hannibal asks, still watching Will carefully, tracking the clenching muscles from his hand up to his shoulder. He can still move out of range, still pin Will now, if he must. But he would rather Will lower the gun of his own volition. To accept his own darkness and power, and surrender to the next part of the plan. It will happen, either way, but compliance will make the transition easier.

Just let go, Will…

On silent, hunter's feet, Jack Crawford eases the Hobbs's front door open and steps inside, freeing his gun from its holster. He can smell the stink of Will's fear, bitter and burnt, and, very faint beneath it, Dr Lecter's. They're here, and Hannibal is afraid.

'You… you have *no* traceable motive,' Will whispers, blinking through the haze of grey spots clouding his vision.

God, he might vomit… His ears are ringing, his *teeth* ache and his skull feels cleaved in two. Acid dribbles onto his brain, sizzling as it melts it from the inside, and his skin is going to slide from his bones with the heat of his body at any moment.

'W-which is why you were so hard to see…'

And Hannibal, *his* Hannibal, his Alpha, his mate… Oh *God*… He tilts his head again, a blank, curious look on his face, cold and impassive… *Evil*… His eyes gleam like chips of black ice and a smile plays with his lips, but there's no warmth there… Will can feel tears running freely now, *hear* the pathetic little mewling sounds he's making but he can't stop. He is utterly adrift, strung out on a crucifix to die for the simple pleasure of his executioner. His *Alpha*.

'You… you were just… *c-curious* what I would do!' he sobs, dizzy from lack of oxygen, tight as a spring and ready to burst.

Please… please let me die. I can't stand this anymore.

'S-someone like me… An Omega who *thinks* how I think… Wind him up… And *watch* him go…'

I loved you… I trusted you…

Fighting bile, Will brushes tears from his eyes with the back of one scorching hand before gripping the gun more tightly. He bares his teeth at his Alpha, at his *psychopath*, and a low snarl echoes from behind the poison-black bones of his ribs.

‘Well, apparently, *Dr Lecter*, this is how I go.’

He raises the gun, ready to fire, but Jack’s voice cuts through the fog.

‘Will?’

The other Alpha appears in the kitchen doorway, tall and commanding, his eyes glowing red in the dark. Jack holds out a hand to still him, telling him to wait.

‘*Easy!*’

Will hesitates, lowering the gun a fraction at the command. Jack doesn’t know… He doesn’t *understand*… But he can’t wait. Hannibal is too dangerous. His crest throbs and sickness stabs at his gut, making his shadow scream.

Will can’t be bonded to this monster anymore.

I’ll make you understand. I’ll make you see.

He takes aim, his face twisting in a moment of pure, unadulterated *hatred*, and then Jack fires. The shot rings out, deafening in the small room, and Hannibal grimaces, turning his face away as Will’s blood sprays across his face.

Jack’s bullet hits Will in his left shoulder, slamming him backwards into the corner of the kitchen cabinets. His feet leave the floor and he collapses in a broken heap, fighting to stay conscious as a terrifying cold sweeps through him, freezing everywhere the fire licked before. *Shock,* he thinks numbly. *This is shock, because I’ve been shot… I’ve been shot by Jack… To protect Hannibal… To protect a killer…*

Will sees Hannibal move, his Alpha’s jaw tight with anger at the damage done to his Omega; his *property,* but Hannibal doesn’t fight when Jack gets in front of him, shielding him from Will. As if Will could do *anything* now… As if Will could ever have done anything against such a predator.

Jack slides Will’s gun away with his foot, his own weapon trained on his chest, and Will stares up at him, seeing the *disgust* and *disappointment* etched into *every* line of the other man’s face…

Please, Jack… Please…

‘See?’ he whispers, *begging* Jack to look behind him and see the horned, skeletal creature. To see past the person suit and the mask, to see the monster beneath it all… ‘*You see?*’

Do you see what he’s done? Please tell me you see what he’s done to me…?

Jack sighs, weary to his bones with it all. Pulls out his cell phone and calls it in, requesting a secure ambulance for Will.

‘J-Jack…’ Will’s voice breaks when the Alpha glares at him, and his plea dies in his throat. Jack’s not on his side… *Nobody* is on his side... Hannibal made sure of *that*. All those

months, all that work…

Tears well in his eyes, and Will's gut hurts like he's been kicked in the balls. All he wants to do is curl up and sob, to beg his Alpha for protection, but how can he when it's his Alpha he needs protecting from?

I still have his seed in me…

He's retching before the thought is finished. Will scrambles onto his hands and knees, dry-heaving at how *dirty* he feels. How *violated*. And then, through the roaring of his blood, he hears footsteps, and feels a warm, strong hand between his shoulder-blades. Hannibal's scent chokes him, and Will shoves backwards, mouth open in a howl.

'No! *NO!'*

'Will!' Jack grabs for him but Hannibal is faster. The Alpha shoves him onto his chest, pinning him, a hand over the back of his neck in an instant. He paralyzes him with a grip on his crest through the layers of clothes, proving his dominance. Will can still breathe, still whimper and tremble, but he can't fight the touch.

He can't do anything. He never really could.

'It's over,' Hannibal whispers, leaning down to brush his lips against the shell of Will's ear. 'Don't fight.'

Will closes his eyes, swallowing the fresh bout of screams trapped beneath his tongue. He can feel the current of his mind calling to him, soothing and warming him even as his body shivers with a fever. He's ill; a distant part of him knows this. Knows, too, that he might die…

Did you plan that, too?

He sinks lower into the darkness, the tension draining from his muscles as heat swallows him, manipulated to the surface by Hannibal's clever fingers. He can smell his scent thicken, sweet vanilla and smoky musk, before something clicks and his thoughts grow fuzzy, fading away on lapping waves of *emptiness.*

It's over… Hannibal's right… He can't fight anymore… He's lost…

He's lost *everything*…

Please don't ever let me wake up.

***

Riding with his sedated mate in the ambulance, Hannibal studies his emotional response to the evening's events. Will's dawning realization, his dark *fury* when he discovered the truth… Oh, they had been truly *exhilarating* to behold… God's vengeful Angel… But Will's sorrow, his torment at the belief that Hannibal had betrayed him… That Hannibal *could* betray him…

Those feelings had stung him. Hurt him… Reminded him of bitter cold and broken bones, of a tiny hand slipping from his grasp and an *ache* inside that could never be filled…

He stays with Will during the admission, and provides the hospital with his insurance details to ensure the best treatment for his Omega. Leaves the room only when the nurses insist, when they settle Will into his bed and cuff his bandaged wrists to the rails, and then he takes a seat to watch over his sleeping mate.

Eight hours later, when Jack Crawford's scent announces his arrival to Will's guarded room before he enters, Hannibal looks up from that same chair beside the bed. He is unshaven and wearing the same, rumpled clothes from the night before, his eyes sunken and ringed with shadows. Jack looks little better, and neither smile in greeting. The only sound is the blip of Will's heart monitor, tracking the steady progress of his recovery.

'The right hemisphere of his brain was inflamed,' Hannibal explains. 'A rare complication of Omegan Prodromal Phasing. They've placed him in an induced sleep, and they're treating him with a combination of estrogen blockers and steroid therapies.'

'Is he responding?' Jack asks, casting his gaze over the IV bags and wires feeding into Will's fragile body.

'More or less,' Hannibal replies, allowing fondness to warm his eyes as it settles on his mate's rising and falling chest. 'He's expected to make a substantial recovery.'

A little scarring on the brain creating a weakness for hallucinations… Nothing Will cannot handle.

Jack hums quietly, and then glances at his fellow Alpha.

'Would you have gone to Minnesota with him if he didn't have a gun on you?' he asks, and Hannibal considers.

'I would have wanted to,' he says, looking back at him. Jack nods slowly, absorbing this, and moves towards the chair on the other side of the bed as Hannibal continues, 'I believe I've failed to satisfy my obligation to Will, more than I care to admit.'

'As his therapist, or his mate?' Jack asks quietly. Hannibal gives him a sharp look, to which Jack shrugs. Hannibal sighs. He has to give the man *some* credit, then. He had assumed Jack would remain ignorant of their relationship.

'Both.'

'Well,' Jack says heavily, sinking into the chair and leaning his elbows on his thighs. 'He's not *your* victim, Doctor.'

'Nor is he yours,' Hannibal replies, a lie to soothe Jack's wounded ego. But the Agent does not look soothed when he turns to Hannibal and says,

'You know, in my time, I've seen people broken by the world… I've seen them broken in all kinds of hideous and offhanded ways… but never like this…' He shakes his head, his eyes

bright. ‘Never like this.’

Hannibal watches as Jack sits back, and he wonders how his legal guardianship of Will is going to affect the impending trial and incarceration. What he can do to protect his Omega…

‘No one in this room will be the same,’ he says quietly.

Jack considers him, his gaze pensive as he watches Will sleep.

‘You’re in for some tough times, Doctor,’ he says, and Hannibal nods.

‘I know.’

‘You love him?’

Hannibal’s gaze tracks to Will’s face, to the pale skin beneath the oxygen mask… He traces the line of Will’s jaw, his soft lips and closed eyes… His brows, no longer furrowed in worry… He stares at his beloved, and he smiles.

‘More than he knows.’

***

Bedelia Du Maurier steels herself at the sound of her doorbell. She approaches slowly, each step measured and considered, and opens the door to reveal Hannibal Lecter, a covered dish in his hands and a twinkle in his cold, dead eyes.

‘Good evening,’ Hannibal says, grinning at his therapist. Bedelia looks lovely; a crimson silk blouse and red pencil skirt, her golden hair satin smooth and perfectly curled beneath her shoulders. Her legs are smooth beneath stockings, ending in killer heels, though she still barely reaches his shoulder.

‘Hello, Hannibal,’ Bedelia says, proud of how steady she’s managed to keep her voice. ‘Please, come in.’

She steps back, welcoming him into her home, and leads him to the dining room, where Hannibal promptly sets out the meal he has brought with him as she decants the wine.

‘Tête du Veau en Sauce Verte,’ he says, lifting the glass lid on the dish and unleashing a thick, ashy scent into the air.

‘Smells like a bonfire,’ Bedelia says, moving from the drinks cabinet to her seat where Hannibal is plating up slices of pale meat.

‘I smoked the veal on a pyre of dry hay,’ the Alpha explains. ‘It imparts a unique, smoldering flavor to the meat…’ He grins, carrying the serving tray to his own place. ‘*And* to the room.’

‘This *is* an… *unexpected* treat,’ Bedelia manages, pouring them each a glass of Shiraz. As she sits, Hannibal leans forward.

‘Thank you for indulging me.’

‘You seemed like you needed to talk,’ Bedelia replies, watching the other Alpha warily.

‘And since you refuse invitations to my dinner table, this is the only way I could cook for you,’ Hannibal teases, taking his own seat.

‘*What’s* on your mind, Hannibal?’ Bedelia asks, refusing to engage in idle chatter. She is, after all, being paid handsomely for this hour. She lifts her glass to her lips, taking a drink of rich wine, but Hannibal dips his nose to gather up the scent before he tastes it. Giving himself time to weigh his words, no doubt.

‘I’m going to see Will,’ he finally replies, sending a tingle down Bedelia’s spine. ‘Tomorrow.’

‘As a patient, or as his mate?’ she asks, adjusting her napkin to cover her unease at the sharp, blank look Hannibal gives her. *Like a shark, scenting for blood…*

‘As a farewell,’ Hannibal says. ‘Of sorts.’

‘I thought Mr Graham was finally going to be the patient who cost you your life,’ Bedelia says, but Hannibal scoffs, cutting into his veal.

‘He didn’t cost me my life. He cost Abigail hers.’

Bedelia inclines her head, acknowledging the statement without agreeing to it. Hannibal gestures to her plate and smiles.

‘Your veal is getting cold.’

‘Controversial dish; veal,’ Bedelia says, cutting off a piece and, under Hannibal’s burning scrutiny, placing it obediently into her mouth. *Who would dare refuse you, I wonder?* She cannot deny, however, how delicious it is; it melts onto her tongue, the smokiness adding a rich aftertaste that lingers on her tongue. ‘Mmm.’

Hannibal smiles, his eyes flickering red at the satisfaction on Bedelia’s face, and he reaches out to swirl his wine.

‘Those who denounce veal often cite the young age at which the animals are killed,’ he says. ‘When they’re in fact older than many pigs going to slaughter.’

Bedelia chews slowly, and swallows before she speaks. She wants Hannibal to understand her.

‘You have to be careful, Hannibal,’ she says. ‘They’re starting to see your pattern.’

Hannibal takes a drink, and then returns to his food.

‘What pattern would that be?’ he asks, his tone deceptively light. Bedelia’s gut flares, but she suppresses the urge to bare her neck in submission.

‘You develop relationships with patients who are prone to violence,’ she replies, and Hannibal quirks an eyebrow at her. ‘*That* pattern.’ She waits until Hannibal looks down again to continue, ‘Under scrutiny, Jack Crawford’s beliefs about you might start to *unravel*.’

Clever girl, Hannibal thinks, his darkness twisting within him. He sets his knife and fork down, pinning her with a chilling gaze. He imagines slicing her open, carving roasting joints from her arms and legs, and plucking out her organs to grind into sausage meat… He imagines it all, and he allows his hunger to spark red in his eyes.

After all, he offers a warning only once.

‘Tell me, Dr Du Maurier… Have *your* beliefs about me begun to unravel?’

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Despair has its own odor. Rotten and bitter, laced with old sweat and blood… An unpleasant accompaniment to the mumblings and rantings of the mentally ill.

The Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane stinks of despair. Hannibal pauses inside the gated entrance, closing his eyes against the assault on his senses. He can smell urine, fecal matter and vomit… Rutting Alphas and terrified Betas, salty with semen and tears. Bleach and cheap detergent.

But, beneath it all, after he discards each unimportant detail, Hannibal finds his Omega. He finds *Will*.

The scent is faint, smoky with anger but sweet as sugar. Warmth flares in his chest, squeezing an extra beat from his heart, and Hannibal begins to walk down the corridor, to the last cell on the left. He tries not to hurry, controls every movement, but he cannot deny his excitement. Will is alive; he is healed, and he is *whole*… Who will greet him is a mystery.

He holds his breath as Will comes into view. Hannibal sees him, sat on the edge of his bunk, hunched over his knees in his prison jumpsuit. Dingy blue, stamped with his prisoner number, his feet encased in hideous gym shoes. But nothing, *nothing* could detract from his beauty, and, for a moment, Hannibal forgets where they are. Forgets *everything*.

His mate is *radiant*, glowing with health and pure, righteous *wrath*.

Beloved…

Hannibal stops, and turns towards the bars. *Aches* to take Will into his arms, to bare his flesh to the world and mark it with fresh bruises… To show *everyone* just how *powerful* this man is. How much *potential* he still has.

His chest rumbles with a purr, and he does nothing to silence it before he speaks.

‘Hello, Will.’

At the voice, Will lifts his head. He knew he would come. There was no way Hannibal could resist. After the hospital… After Minnesota… Of *course* he would come here, to see him

caged.

Anger, he reflects, is an interesting emotion. As Will rises from the lumpy mattress, he realizes that it can be sustained for far longer than fear, and yet spikes like pain. When he smells Hannibal's scent, cedarwood and cloves over heavy musk, his stomach twists with nausea, even as his cock twitches and his ass leaks slick. His heart pounds and heat flares behind his pelvis, radiating out with his pulse. He feels more *alive* now than ever before, and yet his life is *over*…

Hello, Will.

How many times had he called Hannibal, just to hear his voice? Just to hear him say those two words…? And how often had they calmed him, as they do now?

Perfectly conditioned…

He rises slowly and approaches the bars with calm consideration. Braces himself before raising his eyes, taking in his Alpha's expensive coat and tailored suit.

You wanted to look good for me. Am I supposed to be impressed?

Hannibal stares into Will's face, at the dark, stormy blue of his Omega's irises, ringed with gold, still bright despite his maturity. He stares, captivated, at the *shadow* dancing there, violence and passion and *destruction*, cultivated and realized… Free at last.

My beautiful boy… How I adore you.

At the flare of lust in his Alpha's eyes, Will's crests throbs with black rage. It oozes through him like tar, tainting every cell in his body. He wants to smash that face, to break his jaw and rip the beating *heart* from his corpse…

He wants to *destroy* Hannibal. To break his control and show him how it feels to be helpless.

I want to kill you.

He can't say that, of course. Not here; not out loud. But Hannibal *knows*. He can *feel* it. He can *smell* it. The rage. The bloodlust. He *understands*, which is why, when Will speaks the only words he can, he smiles at the threat. The promise.

'Hello, Dr Lecter.'

Chapter End Notes

Oh my goodness, peeps, this was SUCH an exciting chapter to write! I can't WAIT for season 2!!!

So, to make things slightly easier, I've decided to create a Series called 'Love Crime' (oh-so original, I know), which will house all of the Seasons (1-TBC). Therefore, This Dark Heart is Season 1 only, and is now complete. I really hope you've enjoyed, you've been absolutely fantastic, and I look forward to seeing you for Season 2, which I *think* I'm going to call The Reckoning. So watch this space, Fannibals! xxx

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!